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## Philippians 2:19-30

### Intro

Yesterday was an important holiday: “**Reformation Day.**” Yes, you heard me right. Yes, I know that yesterday was Halloween. But it was also a very day for us, as Christians, to remember. On October 31st, in the year 1517, Martin Luther, the great Reformer, nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. By doing so, he sparked a conversation, that led to a controversy, that eventually led to a movement, a **great Reformation of the church, leading to Protestant Christian churches and denominations.** What was this Reformation all about? Many things, but to give a short summary of 2 of the most important issues: **1. First, the authority of God’s Word over the authority of Man,** and **2. Secondly, the core truths of the gospel - that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, all to the glory of God alone.** It was a great movement of GOD that is indeed worth remembering and being thankful for!

I love reading and listening about the Protestant Reformation and the great Reformers during that time - people like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others - who *defended the gospel, the authority of the Bible, and the foundations of our faith.* They did so courageously, even *risking their lives* in the process. The stories of their lives, their actions, and their teachings on the truths of the Bible, encourage and inspire us today to remain faithful to the Lord, to the gospel, and to the authority of God’s Word no matter what the cost.

For a similar reason, I also love reading **biographies of Christian missionaries** - such as the **Baptist missionaries: William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, and Lottie Moon** - **godly men and women who moved their families overseas and endured great hardship to take the gospel to those who had never heard, to make disciples and plant churches where there were none.** And there are many other stories of those who, throughout Church history, have suffered greatly, sometimes even to the point of death, for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

Hearing stories of such faith and godliness inspires me to want to do the same; to live a life sold out for Christ, do all things for His glory and the advance of the gospel, no matter the cost! **Their stories serve as examples for us, living models of what it looks like to live out the**

**Christian faith in our world.** *And we all need examples of what Christian obedience, faithfulness, and godliness looks like.*

Over the past several weeks, as we've gone through Philippians, we have seen that **sanctification**, *the process of growing in Christian obedience, discipleship, and godliness*, is expected in every Christian's life; it's the fruit Christians bear. We have also seen, most clearly in Phil 2:5-11, that **Christ is our goal in Christian obedience; our goal is always to become more and more like Jesus in all that we do; Christ sets the standard, he is our ultimate example of how to live!** However, this goal can be quite daunting; after all, if Christ is the standard, then the bar is set impossibly high, isn't it? Christ lived a perfect, sinless life. But you and I are sinners; yes, as true Christians we grow in godliness, but we will *never* be perfect and sinless in this life, not until heaven. In fact, *the more we grow in Christ, the more we understand just how holy God is, and just how sinful and broken we are!*

So then, **when we look at the impossible standard set by Christ, we can feel pretty discouraged, can't we? We might ask, "Why even try? What real progress can I even make?"** This is why *we all need* examples of other Christians, just like us, who believe in the same gospel, read the same Bible, and grow by the same grace of Christ available to us; real Christian men and women that model before our eyes what it means to live for Christ and the sake of others. **We need examples of what it looks like to imitate Christ and live like Him more and more, in every area of life - so that we are encouraged and strengthened to do likewise.**

And this is exactly what Paul does in Philippians 2:19-30: Paul is holding up **two flesh-and-blood examples of what it looks like for us to live a life transformed by the gospel** - the very thing Paul has been calling us to in Phil. 1:27-2:18. This passage contains lots of details about travel plans, logistics, and updates; we might be tempted to tune this passage out and consider it irrelevant for ourselves today; but that would be a mistake. It contains practical logistics, yes, *but also very practical applications for our lives*. Paul is holding up these two men, Timothy and then Epaphroditus, as living examples of what it looks like to live out the call to Christian obedience. It's as if Paul anticipates the response, "Sure, I would love it if I could follow in the example of Christ, but that's impossible, so why bother?" and he cuts it off by reminding the Philippians that such imitation *is possible by God's grace*; not perfect imitation,

no, but *real, meaningful godliness* - just like we see in the lives of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Two men that this church new personally; real human, normal Christians, just like them - just like us.

[Transition]: So first, we see the example modeled by Timothy: *living not for our own interests, but for the interests of Christ; and therefore, for the interests of others.*

### I. The Example of Living for the Sake of Christ and Others (vv. 19-24)

What Paul tells us about Timothy in the first half of the passage gives us an example of how we, too, should live and think: we should not live for ourselves, but wholly for Christ, and therefore, be concerned for the sake of others over ourselves.

In verse 19, Paul tells the Philippian church why he is sending Timothy to them: *“so that I too may be cheered by news of you.”* Aside from normal updates about their affairs, it seems Paul means that he specifically hopes to hear from Timothy that the Philippian church is doing exactly what Paul has been exhorting them to do in the previous chapters: living a “live... worthy of the gospel,” “standing firm” in the unity of the “faith of the gospel,” “having the same mind” and “same love” for one another, living in selfless humility towards each other. **In short, he hopes to hear that this letter and the ministry of Timothy results in the advance of the gospel, the endurance of the Christian’s faith, and the health of the church.** That this is Paul’s meaning is made sense by the reason he gives for sending Timothy.

Paul hopes to come himself, but in the meantime, he is *sending his best: Timothy*. He completely trusts Timothy to share Paul’s own concern for the spiritual health and growth of these believers in the Philippian church. We see this in verses 20-21: *“For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”* Is Paul saying that every other Christian minister he knows is selfish, and Timothy is the only one who isn’t? No, I don’t think so. In fact, I think verse 20 is *better translated* as, *“For I have no one so like-minded,”* as the CSB translates it; or, in the NASB, *“no one else of kindred spirit.”* Basically, he is saying that Timothy could not be more “like-minded” with himself; they are “kindred-spirits.” After all, Timothy is Paul’s protege, his “son” in the faith, and they have served in the gospel together for quite sometime; and as he says, the Philippians know Timothy’s “proven worth” for themselves (v. 23): Timothy was serving

alongside Paul when they came and first shared the gospel, made disciples, and planted the church in Philippi.

So Paul is emphasizing Timothy's proven, genuine concern *not for himself or his own interests, but for others - especially other believers*. He contrasts Timothy's *selfless example* with the *selfish, self-centered, self-seeking example* of others in verse 21 (and he's most likely referring to those same "rivals" and insincere teachers he mentioned in chapter 1, vv.15-18). He says they "***all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.***" By contrast, Timothy doesn't seek his own interests, but *seeks the interests of Christ above all else!* And what does that look like? It looks like this: **Being genuinely concerned for others; being genuinely concerned about the spiritual health and growth of non-believers, fellow believers, and local churches!** This was true for Timothy, and it can be true of us, too, because this is what it looks like to truly live not for our interests, but for the interests of Christ.

[Application]: And these words are clearly meant to remind us of what Paul has just a bit earlier, in chapter 2:3-5: "***Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus....***" Paul has already told us that "***to live is Christ and to die is gain***" (1:21). We are to live not for ourselves but for Christ, truly being "servants of Christ Jesus" (1:1). This means not living for ourselves, but *for others*, following after the example of Christ Himself, who came down to Earth *not to be served but to serve others, even by living and dying in the place of sinners - in our place!* Therefore, we, too, are called to love and serve each other, as fellow Christians, in all ***humility and unity!*** Not selfishly seeking our own interests. Not proudly and arrogantly thinking we're better than everyone else. Not grumbling and complaining and gossiping about other people. Not arguing and fighting with each other because we're so convinced that we're right and want everyone else to know it. **No, the way of the cross is to truly believe that we are nothing, and Christ is everything; we live for Him by considering other people more important than ourselves; we live not to seek our own interest, to build our own name, or look out for ourselves, but we put others first, seeking their interests and needs above our own, seeking to build them up in Christ and truly love them; we give thanks instead of complaining; we forgive and admit our own fault, instead of disputing and fighting. *THIS is the life we are called to live as Christians; this is a healthy church life***

*we should all be working towards together!* This is what God has been calling us to all through this book!

But in case you start to think, “*Yeah, but that’s not really possible in this life, right? I mean, we’re all still sinners; so why even try?*” Paul cuts that kind of thinking short. As we saw last week, such growth and obedience *is possible because of God’s grace that He promises to work out in our lives!* And to drive the point home, Paul says here: “Look at the example of Timothy! YOU’ve seen with your own eyes how Timothy models such a life of selfless humility! He will consider your interests above his own *because his heart is set on Christ and he serves the Lord, not himself! Therefore, he will genuinely serve you!* And the point is not that Timothy is a “special class of Christian” or meant to be the exception; the point is not to look just at Timothy, but to point our eyes to the Lord of Timothy, Jesus Christ! **Timothy does not live perfectly, but he is an example for them that real, genuine growth and obedience is possible for us by God’s grace!**

So then, brothers and sisters, let us follow this example, and live not for ourselves, but wholly for the interests of Christ! Let us do so by humbly putting each others interests above our own, sincerely caring for each other, caring for each others physical needs, **caring for each others’ souls** - *for this is what Jesus wants us to do!*

[**Transition**]: Next, Paul gives us a second example of living out faithfulness in our lives:

## **II. The Example of Working and Suffering for the Sake of the Gospel (vv. 25-30)**

In the second half of this passage, Paul fills the Philippians in on some details regarding their fellow believer and church member, Epaphroditus, and also holds him up as an example of what it looks like to faithfully live a life for the sake of the gospel, even when it comes at great personal cost, suffering, and the risk of one’s own life.

Most of us are probably familiar with Timothy; we see him in the book of Acts, he’s mentioned in some of the letters of Paul, such as here, and there are two whole books of the Bible (I and II Timothy) that were originally written *to him!* But the man mentioned here, Epaphroditus, is probably not familiar. We don’t know a ton about him, and he is only ever mentioned here, in this passage, and then later in Philippians 4:18. From what Paul tells us of him in this book, we know this: he is a believer, most likely from Philippi; the Philippian church had sent him as a messenger and minister to Paul; he brought the financial gift of the Philippian

church to Paul, and then continued to labor for the gospel alongside Paul. Paul has now sent him *back* to Philippi, now being *a messenger to them*, bringing Paul's letter, the Book of Philippians, to the church. So when the church read this letter, Epaphroditus was with them, and had brought the letter to them. So all of this background information is what lies behind these five descriptions of him in verse 25.

And then Paul fills the church in with more details, explaining not only why he sent Epaphroditus, but working towards why he, too, is an honorable of Christian faithfulness and ministry. In verses 26-28 we learned that this man, as he set out to serve Christ alongside Paul and was laboring faithfully for the sake of the gospel, became very sick, ***“ill, near to death.”*** In a world without the medical practices we enjoy today, one did not typically come back from such an illness; to become gravely ill was a death sentence. And Paul is quick to point out that this was the miraculous mercy of God! For ***“God had mercy on him, and not only on but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.”*** Paul loves this fellow believer, would have greatly mourned his loss, and is filled with joy that the Lord healed him! And so, he is sending him back to the Philippians so that they, too, will no longer worry about him, but will rejoice in how the Lord healed and saved him.

And then, in verses 29-30, Paul drives home the significance of this testimony, making sure that neither the Philippians, nor us, miss the kind of life being modeled for us here: ***“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”*** This last part, *“to complete what was lacking in your service to me,”* is not at all meant to criticize the Philippians; it simply means that they were eagerly praying for Paul and his ministry even raised an monetary offering to help aid Paul and provide for him financially as he labors and even *suffers* for the sake of the gospel. They were eagerly supporting and participating in Paul's gospel mission. So what was lacking? *Physical presence*. Someone needed to make the dangerous journey there to bring the financial gift. They were not physically there to help Paul in his need and support him in gospel ministry while he sits chained to a guard. And so Paul publicly acknowledges not only the church's ministry and intentions, but also the honorable example of this faithful brother who risked his life to support the gospel. The point is clear: *honor such people who faithfully strive for the work of Christ and the advance of the gospel, even at great personal cost and risk to themselves! Follow their example, because this is exactly what all of us should be doing!*

When we think of boldly serving Christ and suffering for the sake of the gospel, we typically jump straight to the context of *persecution* - remaining faithful to Christ and obeying the gospel even when we suffer persecution for it by those who hate Christ, the gospel, and Christian ways of living. This is absolutely a form of suffering for the sake of the gospel, and we are all called to be willing to remain faithful even when it costs us dearly, maybe even our lives, because of the persecution we face from a hostile, unbelieving world. We've seen this come up again and again throughout this book. The Philippians themselves are undergoing persecution, and Paul has been exhorting them to remain faithful, to ***“stan firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents”*** (1:27-28). This reminder about Epaphroditus, who so eagerly served the Lord that he was willing to risk his life for the sake of the gospel, is obviously reinforcing this call to faithfulness amidst suffering, even persecution. *Paul is saying, “Look at the example of your brother. Let his example encourage you to stand firm in the gospel no matter what it costs, because Christ and the advance of the gospel are worth it!”*

But we also have to note that Epaphroditus's suffering *was not caused by persecution* - it came from something seemingly mundane: *sickness*; very deadly and serious, yes, but also something that can happen to anyone. And yet, Paul says that ***“he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life”*** in his efforts! I think the point is this: anytime we strive to be faithful to Christ and carry out the gospel ministry *when it bears a personal cost or risk to ourselves* - whether physically, financially, or in some other way - we are to consider it as being faithful to Christ no matter, even being willing to suffer for His glory and the work of the gospel!

This is an example we are all called to follow. And this doesn't just apply to suffering persecution, or experiencing hardships as foreign missionaries, though it certainly applies to such things; ***it applies to us everytime we strive to be faithful to the gospel of Christ no matter what the personal cost to us might be.*** Maybe it means giving more of your time or money in service to Christ, pouring into your fellow believers at church, supporting missionaries and ministries, or reaching out to unbelievers all around you. Maybe it means making a risky move or life change in order to be obedient and faithful to Christ. Maybe it means boldly standing firm in the faith no matter what the culture, our workplace, our friends and family members, or even government powers might say, think or do to us. Whatever it looks like for you, let us follow in

the example of all who are faithful to Christ no matter what; after all, *for us to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

### III. We Should Both Imitate and Model Faithful Obedience

As we have seen, this passage reminds us of the importance of having examples of Christian obedience and faithfulness in our lives for us to follow. I've mentioned that biographies of past Christians and missionaries can be very helpful for this; but it can also leave us feeling discouraged at times. If the standard set by Christ is impossible, and yet we're called to strive for it, we might still feel discouraged as we look at the extraordinary lives we see in biographies. We might still be tempted to think, "Sure, but they're *super-Christians*; I'm just an ordinary one." And this is why it is so important that we have living examples, *flesh-and-blood models* of Christian faithfulness and obedience, right before our eyes, right here in the local church. After all, this is exactly what Paul does here: he points to ordinary, living examples of faithful obedience; he points to two men that the Philippian church knows well! One of them functioned as a church planting missionary for them; the other, we assume, their fellow church member. They knew them well, even knowing their sins, their shortcomings, their "ordinariness." And yet, they also see them live out faithfulness throughout their normal lives!

We need the same today. We all need **living examples** around us, modeling what it looks like to live out Christian faithfulness in all the areas of life: at work, in the home, in public, at church, in evangelism and discipleship; we all need concrete examples before eyes, showing us what it looks like to live as a Christian husband, wife, father, mother, sibling, child, employee, citizen, church member, deacon, pastor, and on and on we could go. No matter our age, no matter our education, no matter how long we have been believers, none of us have reached the goal - ***because the perfect, righteousness life of Christ is the ultimate example, the standard we are all trying to live up to!*** We all have more growing to do. We all need to keep looking to example and learning from others who are also imitating Christ.

And, on the other hand, we should all, as Christians, make an effort *to be an example of faithful obedience for others!* We should strive to model and teach others as the Lord grows and teaches us.

It's like what we see in **Titus 2**: the older men teaching the younger men what it means to live as a godly man; the older women teaching the younger women what it means to live as a

godly woman. **We should constantly strive to have a culture of life-of-life discipleship in our church.** The spiritually mature live out examples of what Christian maturity looks like, and help equip others to follow in the example. Those who have more experience living as a Christian in this world model what that looks like for those who have less.

1. So first, to the younger believer: Maybe you're young in age. Maybe you're still young in the faith. What an excellent opportunity to intentionally learn from others! Seek out examples of people you see in your life, especially in the church, that seem to be modeling godliness, faithfulness, and obedience; seek out those that know the Bible well seek out those that have strong, healthy biblical lives, marriages, families, careers, and ministries, and seek to learn from them. No, they aren't perfect; yes, you will see their flaws, that's expect; but God has placed you in the same church for a reason, so seek to learn from the godly examples He gives you. In fact, you might even benefit from seeking someone out and asking them to intentionally mentor or disciple you!
2. Secondly, to the more spiritually mature: No, you're not perfect. Yes, we all have further to go. And yet, praise God for the growth and knowledge He has given you over your life! Seek to live out a godly example for others, being mindful of the way you act, what you say, and what you do. Intentionally seek out others and mentor them. Maybe you can teach them about the Bible. Maybe you can teach them, in very practical, life-on-life ways, by taking them into your life and showing them **what it means to strive to live a godly life in a very normal life!**
3. Now, to all of us: you, just like me, need to continue to grow; so constantly look for honorable examples in your fellow church members lives; be encouraged by them to do likewise.

And finally, here is the most important of all of this that we must never forget: **the point is not simply to be like other people, but to be like Jesus Christ!** As Paul says in **1 Cor. 11:1**, ***“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*** That's the point; that's the goal. We are striving to grow in Christ.

And we must never forget: we aren't doing this to be saved, but precisely *because we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!*

If you're not a believer this morning, then the thing for you to do is *not to look to the examples of other people's good works; the point is not to measure up how good your life looks*

*compared to others*; the point is this: **Look to the righteousness of Jesus Christ!** You can never live up to it; **but, he will give it to you freely if you will turn from your sin and trust wholly in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, for he died so that you can live in Him; so repent and believe in Him today!**