

Philippians XIX – Name Dropping (Phil 2:19-30)

Introduction – “As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country” (Prov 25:25). In a day of cell phones and instant-messaging, we hardly know what it means to be unable to get news from just about anywhere we need. And yet, you have been in situations where you were not able to contact or hear from a loved one whom you knew was in some dire situation. Paul’s letters are not simply didactic. They are friendship letters filled with the living out of real people in real time. But as Timothy and Epaphroditus make their cameo appearances in this epistle, we find that Paul has not changed subjects. Instead, he is presenting two men who illustrate the very qualities Paul has been laying out before the Philippians.

First Cameo: Timothy (vv19-24) – It appears that the Philippians were expecting Timothy to come to them, possibly a request that came with Epaphroditus. Paul explains that he will send Timothy “shortly,” but apparently needs to explain this in the letter he will send with Epaphroditus. But Paul also will send Timothy because he wants to hear from Timothy later how the Philippians are doing.

“I trust in the Lord” – This little phrase (“in the Lord” used actually three times in this passage) must not be overlooked. James teaches us to have such an attitude about all of our plans (James 4:13ff).

Proven Service – Paul is confident that Timothy will “care for” the church, for he is “like-minded” with Paul. Paul is known (wrongly) as one who only cared about getting his doctrine right. Right doctrine, corrections, admonitions, even excommunications, for Paul, however were always for the point of protecting, nurturing, and caring for his flock. It is caring for the flock when the leadership exercises godly discipline or instruction with a rebuke or admonition. Paul admonished Timothy to be like this as well (1 Tim 1:3-4, 2 Tim 1:13, 4:2-4).

Like Father, Like Son (v22) – In those days a boy often learned his father’s trade serving alongside of him. Paul uses this idea in describing Timothy’s proven character. He is not like others (v 21, hearkening back to 2:1-4), but has followed Paul closely (2 Tim 3:10-11). Timothy demonstrates the very things Paul has commanded. He has been tried and tested, and while now a leader he can be trusted for he knows how to be led as well. There is a father-son loyalty between Paul and Timothy. Paul calls on all the church to follow him closely as well (Phil 3:17).

Second Cameo: Epaphroditus (vv25-30) – Likely the carrier of this letter back to Philippi, Epaphroditus had been sent by the church to minister to Paul. He had become sick unto death on the way, but had risked his life in order to complete his calling (sound like an example of someone else? – 2:5-8). We should note that trials and afflictions are *normal* for the Christian experience, and that when one is delivered from a trial, it is the *mercy* of God. Paul exhorts the church to receive him “in the Lord”, that is, according to God’s providence he will return. He is to be received with gladness, and such men are to be upheld in high esteem. It is his self-sacrifice, not necessarily his earthly success, which are to be esteemed. Epaphroditus was a living example of Paul’s commands. He understood the call of discipleship (Luke 9:23), and refused to sow sparingly (2 Cor 9:6-9). Consider his titles in verse 25 –

Brother – This is not a trite usage. When Jesus was told that His mother and brothers were looking for Him, He turned to His followers and said, “*Here are my mother and my brothers*”. For Christians, the saying should go: Water is thicker than blood. Our baptism into Christ supersedes our loyalty to family. This is not to put down our family as unimportant. In fact, the more we understand rightly our baptismal brotherhood, the more biblically we will live out our blood brotherhood.

Fellow Worker – Our partnership in the gospel is a partnership of callings, of vocations in Christ (more on this at Family Camp). Paul is not afraid of using the “w” word. Every Christian has gospel work to do. We are not only to listen and learn. We are to learn and put into practice, linking ourselves with the work of brothers and sisters in the spread of the gospel, in rendering up godly offspring, in proclaiming and displaying Christ as King of kings in every area of life.

Fellow Soldier – We are at war, and this is not to be understood as a metaphor. We are at war with our lusts (1 Pet 2:11). We are at war with the powers of darkness – the world, the flesh, and the devil. We must put on the full armor of God. We do not fight with guns and bullets, but with the Word and by the Spirit casting down arguments and bringing every thought into captivity (2 Cor 10:3-6). But note – you are not only an individual soldier, but a fellow soldier.

Messenger/Apostle – He was a sent-one, not simply serving on his own. We are not only to give a cup of water, but we must do so in the name of the Lord (Matt 10:42, Mark 9:41). Everything we do is to be done in His name and for His glory. From these words of Jesus, we must also realize what a big deal it is when you minister to the needs of the Lord’s children.

More Timothy’s and Epaphroditus’s – Here is Jesus Christ, now lay down your life and die. For He will raise you up into a new life, a new society, a new kingdom, a new calling. “*Behold all things have become new*”. The fruit of gospel faith is that, full of God’s mercy you become merciful, full of God’s love, you love God’s children, full of God’s glory, you seek to glorify Him. This is what God is working in. Then, by faith (always by faith) Jesus calls His disciples to work it out (Matt 10:27-42).