

Thru The Bible Commentary-4

Philippians 2:19-30

MIND OF TIMOTHY—LIKE-MINDED WITH PAUL

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state [Phil. 2:19].

Timothy was Paul's spiritual son. Paul had great confidence in him. He could trust Timothy to care for the state of the Philippian believers.

For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state [Phil. 2:20].

Here we have described the mind of Timothy, and we find that he is like-minded with Paul. Since he was like-minded with Paul, it means that he had the mind of Christ, and he was characterized by humility. We don't need a National Council or World Council of Churches to bring men together. In fact, we don't need any organization to bring them together. If they both have the mind of Christ, they *are* together.

Timothy had been faithful to Paul. Sometimes a convert later turns against the person who led him to the Lord. This is like a child turning against a parent. Paul had had that happen to him, but Timothy was faithful to him. Paul was sending him to the Philippian believers because he could trust him. It is wonderful to have men like-minded with Christ so they can work together.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's [Phil. 2:21].

There were many others who were seeking their own glory. They wanted to make a name for themselves. Because they were seeking their own glory, they were willing to belittle Paul.

How do *you* respect others who are standing for the Word of God today? When I hear a man of God being criticized, I recognize that somewhere there is strife and vainglory. The mind of Christ will not allow you to criticize another man who stands for Christ. Paul says, "I can't trust these other men."

But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel [Phil. 2:22].

People speak a lot about togetherness in our day. There can be no more togetherness than for two people to have the mind of Christ. They are together even though they may be miles apart. That is why there is such a bond between fellow Christians who have the mind of Christ.

When a Christian young man and a Christian young lady fall in love, there is a togetherness that you cannot have in just a sexual marriage. A relationship that is simply physical can be bought on any street corner. But when a husband and wife have the mind of Christ, they are really together. There is no human ceremony that can bring two people together in that way. It is a glorious, wonderful relationship.

Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly [Phil. 2:23-24].

Paul wanted Timothy to be the one who would bring them the message about what was going to happen to him there in the prison. Paul had hopes that he would be released from prison. Tradition says that he was released from prison and had quite an itinerant ministry after this, although this is not recorded in Scripture. When the Christians were persecuted under Nero, naturally Paul, the leader, was brought back and executed.

MIND OF EPAPHRODITUS—THE WORK OF CHRIST

Epaphroditus was another who had the mind of Christ. He and Paul and Timothy were all together, brethren in the Lord, serving the Lord. Remember that he is the pastor of the church in Philippi.

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants [Phil. 2:25].

Paul had founded the church at Philippi, but Epaphroditus was not jealous of Paul. Paul loved Epaphroditus because he had the mind of Christ and Paul could trust him. He calls him "my brother, and my companion in labour, and my fellowsoldier." Paul says, "He is my fellowsoldier—he fights with me. He doesn't stick a knife in my back when I'm away. He doesn't side with my enemies. He stands shoulder to shoulder with me for the faith."

"But your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." He was of practical help to Paul who is confined there in chains.

For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick [Phil. 2:26].

This is almost humorous here. Epaphroditus got sick, and word was sent back to the church at Philippi that their own pastor was sick. He longed for them—he probably was a little homesick also. Then when he heard that the church back there was mourning for him because he was sick, he had a relapse because it hurt him that they were hurt because he was sick! There was sort of a vicious circle set in motion here. But it was good because it revealed the marvelous relationship between the church at Philippi and their pastor.

In my conference ministry I speak in many churches, and I have learned that I can judge a church by its attitude toward a pastor who preaches and teaches the Word of God. When a deacon takes me aside and says, "Dr. McGee, we have a fine young pastor, and he is preaching the Word of God," this rejoices my heart. But sometimes a deacon takes me aside and says, "Say, how do we get rid of a pastor like we have? He is too opinionated, too dogmatic, and he wants to run things." I ask him, "Is he teaching and preaching the Word?" When the deacon's answer is, "Oh, yes, but we have had that all along," I can see that the Word has had no effect upon that man. If his feeling is shared by the church in general, that church is doomed. The rejection of a Bible-teaching preacher is the death knell of many churches across this land of ours. You see, the Devil has been very clever.

He has shifted his attack from the Word of God itself to the man who teaches the Word of God. I find this is true across the length and breadth of our nation. The real test of a church is its attitude toward its pastor.

Epaphroditus was greatly loved by his church, and that speaks well for the church in Philippi.

For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow [Phil. 2:27].

Let me point out something here that you may not notice. Many sincere believers today hold the theory that Christians should not be sick, that they should trust God to heal them. Let me ask a question: Why didn't Paul heal Epaphroditus? He was so sick he almost died! You see, Paul and the other apostles had "sign gifts?" because they did not have what we have today, a New Testament. When Paul started out with the gospel message, nothing of the New Testament had been written. Paul himself wrote 1 Thessalonians, the second book of the New Testament to be penned. When he went into a new territory with his message, what was his authority? He had no authority except sign gifts, which included the gift of healing. But now Paul is nearing the conclusion of his ministry. You will remember that Paul had a thorn in the flesh which the Lord Jesus would not remove. Instead, He gave Paul the grace to bear it. Then you remember that Timothy had stomach trouble. If Paul had been a faith healer, why hadn't he healed Timothy? Actually, he told him to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. And in 2 Timothy 4:20 he said that he had left Trophimus in Miletum *sick*. Why hadn't he healed him? And now Paul says he has this young preacher, Epaphroditus, with him, and he was so sick he almost died. Paul didn't heal him. Rather, he gives all the credit to God; he says that God had mercy on him. His healing came about in a natural sort of way. Paul made it a matter of prayer, and God heard and answered prayer. Why hadn't Paul used his gift of healing? Because at this late stage, even before the apostles disappeared from the scene, the emphasis was moving back to the Great Physician.

You see, this epistle is emphasizing the mind of Christ, a humble mind. If I were a faith healer, I would be in the limelight; I would be somebody very great and very famous. But I'm not. The Lord Jesus is the Great Physician. When it was first discovered that I had cancer, I received a great number of letters advising me to go to this healer and that healer. No, I didn't go to anyone, my friend, except a very fine cancer specialist and the Great Physician. I had an appointment with Him and I told Him I wanted to live. I turned over my case to Him. And He gets the credit for what happened to me.

So here is Paul the apostle toward the end of his ministry putting no emphasis on healing whatsoever. He has a sick preacher with him, but he does not exercise the gift of healing that he had. Why? Because Paul is shifting the emphasis where it should be, upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to them.

I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful [Phil. 2:28].

Paul wants them to rejoice, not sorrow. "And that I may be the less sorrowful"—he was disturbed about the church in Philippi because it had been mourning instead of rejoicing.

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation [Phil. 2:29].

How gracious Paul was with this preacher from Philippi! A man like Epaphroditus should be respected and loved.

And, my friend, we should respect the one who is teaching the Word of God. If he has a gift of teaching which God is using, both the gift and the individual should be respected. Our attention should be focused upon the Word of God. I just don't participate anymore in conventions and seminars that focus attention on problems—the drug problem, the alcohol problem, the sex problem, the youth problems, and the senior citizen problems—and offer psychological solutions for them. My friend, the *problem* is that we don't get back to the Word of God. It is the Word of God that reveals Christ and the mind of Christ.

Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me [Phil. 2:30].

Epaphroditus was doing the work of Christ. He had to have the mind of Christ to do that.

It sends chills up and down my spine to read about these men. This is in the first century, at the time of the Roman Empire. The empire of Caesar Augustus moved out and took over the world. The law of Rome became supreme everywhere. There was no mercy shown to anyone, but there was law and order everywhere. There was not a power in that day that could protest against Rome. Then there went out this little man, Paul the apostle, and those who were like-minded with him, and they preached a gospel that there is a God of the universe who, through a redemption that He had wrought on a Roman cross, had provided mercy for mankind. Multitudes turned to the Lord Jesus in that day.

Now I see this little man, Paul the apostle, chained to a Roman soldier. What is he doing? Well, he is witnessing for Christ, and he is rejoicing in the Lord. He has the mind of Christ. Also I see a fine young man, Timothy, walking in that pagan city. You say you cannot live for Christ in a godless society? Look at Timothy. He did pretty well. He had the mind of Christ. And then I take a look at Epaphroditus, a faithful pastor way up yonder in the city of Philippi—it was a Roman colony, but it was a pagan, heathen city. Epaphroditus had the mind of Christ.

Then I look at Vernon McGee, and I say to him, *Stop offering excuses in this day in which you are living!* If these men could have the mind of Christ in the first century, today in the twentieth century right where we are now, you and I can have the mind of Christ. Not by imitation, but by yielding to Him the Spirit of God can produce in our own lives the mind of Christ. Oh, how desperately this is needed in our day!

Philippians 4:15-20

Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only [Phil. 4:15].

This church was a jewel. There are churches like it across this country today. They have a wonderful fellowship and a heart for the things of God. God is blessing them in marvelous, wonderful ways. The Philippian church was close to the apostle Paul. They were the ones who sent support to him—Paul was their missionary. Wouldn't you have loved to have had Paul as your missionary and to have had a part in his support?

For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity [Phil. 4:16].

We know from the account in Acts 16 and 17 that Paul had to leave Philippi by the request of the authorities. He went on to Thessalonica where those who opposed the gospel he was preaching set the city in an uproar. No one was helping Paul but the Philippian believers—"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."

Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account [Phil. 4:17].

That church in Philippi has been getting dividends on their contribution right down to the present time. Paul wrote them this epistle to thank them. We are studying the epistle today, and we are profiting from this study. This is a part of the dividends of their contribution. They have stock in the apostle Paul, if you please. They still have a part in getting out the Word of God!

But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God [Phil. 4:18].

The priest in the Old Testament went into the holy place to put incense on the altar, and it ascended with a sweet smell. A Christian in his giving is like a priest making an offering to God. When it is made in the right spirit, it is, as Paul is saying to the Philippian believers, more than just making a donation or taking up a collection. It is an offering, an odor of a sweet smell to God. And that is what your gift is when it is given in the right spirit.

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus [Phil. 4:19].

Thinking of their sacrifice to supply his need, Paul assures them that God would supply all their needs. He doesn't say all their *wants*—he doesn't include luxury items—but all their *needs*. However, He does supply luxury items many times. When He does, it is surplus. He does it out of His loving-kindness.

Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen [Phil. 4:20].

God gets all the glory. He will not share His glory with another. ¹

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (5:328-329). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.