

## Gospel Friendship | Paul's Letter to the Philippians

*Honorable Mention or Celebrity Slaves*

Rev. T.J. Campo

7.13.14

Philippians 2.19ff

*But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.<sup>18</sup> You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.*

<sup>19</sup> *But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.* <sup>20</sup> *For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.* <sup>21</sup> *For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.* <sup>22</sup> *But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.* <sup>23</sup> *Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me;* <sup>24</sup> *and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.*

<sup>25</sup> *But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;* <sup>26</sup> *because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.* <sup>27</sup> *For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.* <sup>28</sup> *Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.* <sup>29</sup> *Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;* <sup>30</sup> *because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. (Phi 2.17ff)*

Thanks to Lucas for filling the pulpit while we were in Vienna with the short-term mission team. It's great to know that we have great "good-news preachers" who can step in when I'm gone.

Last time we looked at the present series, we saw the Apostle Paul writing from a prison cell, *jailed for publically proclaiming the good news about God's grace in Jesus Christ*. And Paul, addressed what we called the "sanctification gap" i.e. if we are restored to God STRICTLY on the basis of grace *then where's the motivation to be good?* If it all depends on what Jesus Christ DID – if our standing before God is determined by what Jesus did, then why not just receive that gift of grace from God and...go to Margaritaville... just live the life of pleasure and "eat, drink and be merry"?

And we saw that God sort of “sets up shop” in us when we begin to believe. He’s at *work* in the life of the believer and He begins to *set up NEW desires and NEW energies to carry out those desires*. He “allures” us, draws us toward Jesus Christ and toward His way of living and loving. He puts a fighter in us.

Today, we follow Paul even deeper into this line of thinking. He gives us a kind of “behind the scenes” view of *how the church functions*...It’s the MISSION and METHOD of the church exhibited in a very earthy, flesh and blood, very practical way.

Two men who are in the “advanced stages of the disease” – the grace-life has really eaten them up. And as we see what’s going on in this scene we get a view of what TRUE SPIRITUALITY looks like and of what these Christians are really TRYING TO DO in the world – what is their agenda? What platform or policies, what mission and methods are these Christians advancing?

And this is really good to KNOW if you're considering Christianity (as a worldview and a way of life) and really important for those already committed to Christ because it tells us what to EXPECT and to aim for in our lives and in the Church.

Let’s look very simply at the Christian Church in Mission and in Method: 1) Layers of the Text 2) Players in the Text and 3) Conveyors of the Text – i.e. why and how to actually *carry these ideas forward in our generation*

Our OBSERVATION of this passage begins with the idea that there are a couple different layers here. At the simplest/surface level, this is a LETTER. We’re reminded that God included in His book these very human communications between real flesh-and-blood people. When Paul and the other Apostles wrote these letters, they were written to and from actual people. They contain the elements we’d expect to find in ordinary letters – references to people.

And this, behind the scenes information, clues us in to how the Christian life is lived. It’s not a retreat FROM real life into a monastery or a retreat center. Yes, there’s the practice of solitude but mostly it’s NOT ivory-tower, golden-temple – it’s living room and workshop and relationships (“a spirituality for the road”).

This particular PART of the letter is a kind of travelogue i.e. Paul (as he does in most all his letters) he tells the recipient churches his hopes about future travels. “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy...I trust that I myself will come also...”

This particular bit of travel info is making two points. #1 – The guy you expect to come your way will NOT be coming and #2 – A guy you DON'T expect to come your way WILL BE COMING.

Timothy will not be coming. The reason I am NOT sending him is that I'm lonely and vulnerable and in jail and I REALLY need the company of a friend of "proven worth". I want to dispatch him and I know he'll be a big help to the Church at Philippi and I will send him as soon as I am able...just not yet.

And Epaphroditus, he is a member or leader in the church at Philippi and you sent him with money so I could eat while in prison...and sent him to join my church-planting team. You expected that he would be a full-time, long-range member of my team...but I'm sending him back to YOU...not what you expected!

So, again, at face value, at the very basic level that's what we just read...an ancient letter...a travelogue ... an explanation of changes in plans.

BUT, something more is going on here at a deeper level. It's unusual that Paul would apparently stop his train of thought to include these mundane details; usually he puts them at the end of the letter and we get these miscellaneous facts AFTER the main thrust of the letter. HERE, though, Paul apparently interrupts himself and we wonder why?

He's BEEN discussing examples. He used himself as an example – "this is how the grace of God showed up in ME, and enabled me to endure imprisonment".

He used a word (v.14) that suggested the NEGATIVE example of the ancient Israelites, "Don't grumble or complain ...(like those who wandered in the wilderness)".

AND Paul USED the ultimate example... of Jesus Christ, (remember?), "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, ... emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant... humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death..."

AND then... in the middle of all these examples...examples...examples – he breaks into the travel news...odd... unless... he's sort of killing two birds with one stone.

These two men...whose plans have changed...and YOU need to know the facts...I MIGHT AS WELL TELL YOU ABOUT IT NOW BECAUSE THEY ARE ALSO – JUST WHAT I'VE BEEN DISCUSSING – they are an example of all I've been saying.

This is not just a “btw” – this is a perfect opportunity for Paul to GIVE these young believers in the first European congregation a couple real, tangible models of everything Paul’s been teaching.

You want to get your heads around this Gospel? You want to see my theology come OFF the blackboard and onto the blacktop – a theology for the road, a worldview that’s for real life? Here’s what it looks like – Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was in Christ – these two men *have* that attitude. In case anyone finds my examples hard to relate to “because... well you’re the great Apostle Paul and HE is the great Christ, the incarnation of God!...Paul, you...uh... you uh...got anything a little closer to home?”

Yes! Consider Timothy. Born of a pagan father and a Jewish mother who believed the gospel and who along with a believing grandmother raised this Timothy to believe...and in believing, the grace of God went deeper and deeper into this young man’s character and it changed him...IS changing him. AND he has become (1 Cor 15.10) by grace a man of proven worth. The gospel has so advanced in him that he wants (v.22) to see it advance in the whole world!

And Epaphroditus is from their congregation. They had hoped he would represent them well and be a long-range member of Paul’s team. Now he’s coming home early and some will be disappointed but Paul says, “This is a triumph of grace! This man is so permeated by the grace of God that his character is becoming like the character of Jesus Christ – this man became obedient to the point of death – just like Jesus Christ did.”

This is what it looks like when people are saved by grace – when they receive God’s gift in Jesus Christ and then they keep coming back again and again to the Good News... As they face their weakness and fears and sins...and keep believing that because of Jesus Christ, they are NOT defined by their sins or backgrounds or weaknesses or (as we’ll see next week) not defined by their successes either – when believers continue to repent and believe – the beautiful contagion of grace and of Christ’s life seeps in and makes them little-by-little LIKE Him.

If you want to see an advanced case just look at the life of this leader from YOUR church that I’m sending back to you... he’s got a bad case of grace – “honor people like this” (29).

And what motivates all these grace-men, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus IS NOT fear of getting caught or a quest to be accepted by people or by God... they’re not trying to get in – THEY ARE IN.

They obey out of joy and out of the sense of confidence and assurance that they are secure with God and belongers – no MEMBERS (like fingers, like lungs, like ears or eyes) MEMBERS in the Body of Christ. It's joy that motivates them; it's grace and the Holy Spirit that empowers them – it's God at work in them that frees them to run and work out their salvation with awe and delight!

You want to see what my theology looks like in very practical terms – look at Epaphroditus. He's caught the real disease.

Now, what are we to emulate from this earthy little slice of New Testament life and mission? What does this little section (which we might easily skip over) what is it calling us to do and why how should we do it? How to convey it in our generation:

Well for one thing it pictures a view of spiritual life and practice that requires friendship. There's real cooperation and togetherness and VERY deep empathy between Paul and the members of these churches.

Epaphroditus left his heart in Philippi. He loved his home church. He wanted to get back there. He knew they had gotten wind of his sickness and he hated that they were worrying about him. Very deep empathy and very deep relationship. It gives us a sense and feel for what church life is meant to be. It's not hit and run, come Sunday, get a jolt and see you next week.

And I say that, NOT to make you feel guilty, if you're on the periphery but to allure you. The Psalmist said, "My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God." This is what grace does to you. It not only saves you, it compels you TOWARD the Body of Christ.

So, go with it...or ask God today, "Lord, have I caught the real disease? Give me the longing for deep relationships in the Body of Christ like the Psalmist had and like Epaphroditus, Timothy, Paul and all the people of grace have.

Second, the Apostle refers to the mission of the church in v. 22 as "the furtherance of the gospel". This is what Paul was into and Timothy and all those early Christians and in fact ALL people who know God's grace in Jesus Christ, they want OTHERS to see this devastating beauty of God's character – the mercy and grace of God, the Good News.

St. Andrews has planted a number of Churches in our long history – Christ Covenant in SW Ranches; Redeemer Presb (a Haitian cong in N Miami) and we're getting ready to help John and Virginia Houmes in E Hollywood and Hallandale.

What an unspeakable joy it was to be in our sister church in Vienna, Austria. It's a very beautiful but very secular city and now there's a grace-centered congregation that St. Andrews helped to establish - "the furtherance of the gospel". It was so emotional for me (and for others on the team) to see this Body of believers... We FELT such a kinship. It felt like... the New Testament (except we weren't wearing robes or riding in chariots).

Brad asked me to preach through an interpreter last Sunday ...and I really hate when preachers get all sanctimonious in tone ("Oh...dearly beloved...let us come now before the throne...") as if God NEEDS us to work it up...

But it seemed wrong...seemed rude and grossly inappropriate for me not to open with some words of holy greeting and I did say, "St Andrews Presbyterian Church, your sister church sends you her greetings and we feel a kinship to you..."

And I felt inadequate...but also...sort of apostle-like and that IS the picture we get here. We are connected with other churches and we are engaged in the furtherance of the Gospel. We're moved by joy because we want the INFINITE love of God – we want the story of what God did in Jesus Christ, the Cross and the Resurrection – WE WANT THAT TO BE KNOWN EVERYWHERE.

That's why we are apostle-like, why we still think it's CRUCIALLY important to be sending and receiving people in and out of our church to further the gospel. If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, I just told you our little secret – we don't want to POWER the bad sinners out there into submission... but we DO want to share our joy.

At the Cross Jesus Christ hushed the Law's loud thunder – He was judged so that the flame of judgment would be quenched for me... He has washed us with His blood...and the Tomb is empty. His sacrifice was accepted – justice is settled for all who believe... So... believe... enter in...IT'S GOOD NEWS for sinners like us. Join us and share our joy. (That's our sinister agenda – now you know).