

This morning, I am continuing in a sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which is a letter written by the Apostle Paul from a Roman prison to a church in Philippi that he had started. This morning we will be in verses 19-30 of chapter 2.

***Philippians 2:19-30** - I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself **will come soon**. ²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may **have less anxiety**. ²⁹ Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.*

I want to begin this sermon with a confession: I almost skipped this passage. After all, at first glance this appears to be nothing more than Paul giving the Philippians a personal update on two men who are laboring alongside him: **Timothy**, who is like a spiritual son to him and has served with Paul in the work of the gospel for many years, and **Epaphroditus**, who the Philippians sent to Paul with a letter from them and to take care of his needs while he was in prison. Paul is evidently sending this letter that we are reading to the Philippians with Timothy and Epaphroditus, and so he wants to let the Philippian church know why he has sent these men.

So, I almost skipped this passage. But there are a couple things that are worth our attention today, and I do believe that God has challenged me through this passage and will hopefully encourage you. The first thing worth noting is that if you compare this letter to other letters Paul wrote, you find that in most of his other letters, this kind of section would be in the end. A typical pattern in Paul's letters is to greet the church, to remind them of the gospel, of what Jesus did for them, to exhort them to live their lives in a manner consistent with the gospel, and then to end with a section like this, where he says hi to some people or gives the church an update on people serving with Paul, or tells them why he is sending certain people

to them. But in Philippians, the part that would typically come last comes in the middle. Why is that?

Well, think back to the previous section of his letter, which we looked at over the past three sermons. In this section, he has been pleading with the Philippians to not be so self-centered, but to look to the interests of others, to elevate the needs of others above their own needs. He has pointed them to the example of Jesus, who even though He was in very nature God, the eternal Son of God, He took the lowest place, being a servant, dying a humiliating death on the cross, in order to save them from their sins and restore them to a right relationship with God.

Remember verses 3-8:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* ⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* ⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,* ⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* ⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

Paul exhorts the Philippians to let the love of God as shown in the example of Jesus transform them so that they would likewise lay down their lives in service to others.

So I think Paul's inclusion of this section right after that one is intentional. I think you can see that Paul carefully chooses his words in a way that portrays both Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples of what he has been instructing them to do. About Timothy, he writes: *"I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.* ²¹ *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* ²² *But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."*

And about Epaphroditus, he writes, *"Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him,* ³⁰ *because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me."* Evidently Epaphroditus was willing to risk his life to take care of Paul's needs while he was in prison, and Paul lifts him up to the Philippians as an example of selfless and sacrificial service.

The first thing that stands out about this section is how important it is for us to be a living example of the message we proclaim. As DL Moody put it, *"Out of 100*

men, I will read the Bible, and 99 will read the Christian.” As great as it is to have God’s Words, most people will not care what the Bible says unless they see something beautiful or attractive or at least intriguing in those who claim to be following the God of the Bible. And Paul is clear – most people don’t look to the interests of others. But Timothy does. And Epaphroditus does as well. And so I am sending them to you, and I want you to see modeled in them the kind of selfless and sacrificial love that I am telling you about.

One of the most challenging passages as far as I’m concerned is 1 Corinthians 11:1. It comes at the end of a section where Paul is telling the Corinthians that in Christ they have freedom, but to use their freedom not for self-indulgence but to serve others and glorify God. He writes this:

*1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1 - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- ³³ even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. ^{NIV} 1 Corinthians 11:1 **Follow my example**, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. How many of you can honestly say that? More than likely, there may be some areas where you can say that, and others where you know you can’t. But in this case, Paul is saying that he has learned to elevate the needs of others above his own, to not live for himself or seek his own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved and so that God might be glorified. What a church we would be if this were our heart and mission!

If you call yourself a follower of Jesus, people will be watching you closely for signs of hypocrisy, that you are not who you claim to be. As Brennan Manning put it:

“The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and then walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

On the one hand, we must be clear that the message we preach is the gospel, not a message of sinless perfection. As the singer-songwriter Andrew Peterson put it:

“It’s the great, confounding reversal of the Gospel of Jesus. If the word we preach is one of attainable perfection, of law, of justification by works, then

when we fail, our testimony fails with it. But if we preach our deep brokenness and Christ's deeper healing, if we preach our inability to take a single breath but for God's grace, then our weakness exalts him and we're functioning as we were meant to since the foundation of the world."

Yes, we preach the gospel. But we also claim to be following Jesus. So let our lives be an example of that. So the first thing that stands out is the importance of a living witness.

The second is a word that caught my attention, that I want to meditate on today, a word that is found when Paul is talking about Epaphroditus in v. 29: *"Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me."*

Honor men like him.

What does it mean to honor someone? How do you show them honor?

To honor someone or something is to value, respect, highly esteem, treat as precious, weighty or valuable. It builds up, encourages, believes the best. Dishonor treats as common or profane. It tears down, belittles, devalues, assumes the worst. You honor by praising, complimenting, thanking, treating as valuable, elevating as important.

Who does the Bible instruct us to honor?

First and foremost, God:

***Psalm 22:23** - You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!*

***Revelation 4:11** - "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and **honor** and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

We are instructed to honor God not just in words but in action:

Matthew 15:7-9 - *You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:
⁸ "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They
 worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."*

Honor with your body:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy
 Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰
 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

Honor with your wealth:

Proverbs 3:9-10 - *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your
 crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim
 over with new wine.*

Honor your parents:

Exodus 20:12 - *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in
 the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

Honor your spouse:

Hebrews 13:4 - *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept
 pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

I give you this ring... with all I am and with all I have, I honor you.

Honor the governing authorities:

1 Peter 2:17 - *Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers,
 fear God, honor the king.*

Honor the emperor, even though he is persecuting Christians?!?

Honor church leaders:

1 Timothy 5:17 - *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of
 double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*

Honor the elderly:

Leviticus 19:32 - *Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.*

Why do we honor?

Because people are made in the image of God

Psalm 8:3-5 - *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*

James 3:9-10 - *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*

You honor what you value or esteem. If you see them as made in God's image, then you will honor them. We don't treat people as common or ordinary. Every person bears the image of God and is worthy of great honor. And so we are called to honor each other:

Romans 12:9-10 - *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

The ESV puts it this way: *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Outdo one another in showing honor. You don't need to wait for a funeral to honor someone. Honor people in your life today.

John 12:26 - *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

Honor your elders and those who support them – Andy & Holly, Eric & Katie, Ron, Duane & Marcia, Tim, John & Carrie

Honor those who have served and supported this church for years – Jim & Dorothy Scrobko, Peter & Gloria Wu, Andy & Holly Hood, Ron Say

Honor those who have been through painful church experiences but continue to gather to worship God
 Honor those who continue to get off the mat to trust in God
 Those who courageously tried out a new church
 Honor those who serve in quiet, behind-the-scenes ways – John, Don, Nancy on Fridays, Patty
 Honor those who have walked with me through the hardest times of life.
 Honor Deryk & Christy
 Honor Michele

If you're anything like me, you have mixed feelings about being honored. Part of you appreciates the recognition and approval, while part of you feels like you shouldn't appreciate the recognition and approval, because part of you knows that anything good in you is because of God, and that you have plenty in you that is not worthy of honor.

There is a great quote by C.S. Lewis from *The Weight of Glory* that I think will help as he meditated on this: *"It is written that we shall 'stand before' Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God... to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness... to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son - it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is."*

On that day, He will honor us. He will glory in us. All the faults will be covered by Jesus' death for us, and all that was good will be celebrated, honored, and rewarded. Or as Jesus put it:

Matthew 25:21 - *"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"*

To honor each other is to emulate our God, who covers over our sins and honors our faithfulness and service and love, however imperfect it may seem to us. That is our God. Let us honor Him this morning!