**THE MAN WHO HONORS GOD**

**(Philippians 2:25-30)**

**December 8th, 2024**

**READING THE TEXT**

**Philippians 2:25-30**

**25But for now I have considered it necessary to send Epaphroditus to you. For he is my brother, coworker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to me in my need. 26Indeed, he greatly missed all of you and was distressed because you heard that he had been ill. 27In fact he became so ill that he nearly died. But God showed mercy to him—and not to him only, but also to me—so that I would not have grief on top of grief. 28Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you can rejoice and I can be free from anxiety. 29So welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, 30since it was because of the work of Christ that he almost died. He risked his life so that he could make up for your inability to serve me.**

**PREACHING THE TEXT**

 Let’s dig into this text and look at some key words

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Vs 25

Paul is giving a reference for Epaphroditus and asking the church to honor him for four reasons. He is a brother, a co-worker, and fellow soldier and messenger and minister to Paul. It is worth taking some time to look at these terms. I think it would be wise for all of us to ask how we can be like Epaphroditus and carry the recommendation of Paul.

**Brotherhood**

The first term used to describe Epaphroditus is that he is a brother. In the Roman world in which this church was located, there were many divisions. The people of Rome were divided by race. Some were true romans, and others were not. There were divisions between the races of people. Romans and Greeks were divided because Rome conquered the Greeks. And Jews were divided or separated from all non-Jews. Then there were great divisions between the rich and poor. The poor had to pay off their debts by becoming servants of the rich. The rich thought they were better than the poor, after all the gods shined on them and not the undeserving poor.

In our world there are divisions between political parties. People hate and demean those who affiliate with the opposite party and slander one another. And there are divisions between black and white and brown and native Americans.

In the church, Christ turns: Boss vs employee, rich vs poor, black vs white vs brown into brothers who love one another. Satan and the world divide people by positional and outward categories (such as race). Not so with Christ our common adoption Father!

The world’s Attempt To Produce Unity

 The world attempts to produce unity apart from Jesus Christ and it fails miserably. Here are a few of the ways the world is trying to bring unity through uniformity.

1. Wokeism: Some promote a woke agenda and by force and psychological pressure make people line up with a radical agenda. When you “wake up” and recognize you are privileged if you are white, then you are “woke” and must make up for past oppression by giving the less privileged a boost. That will provide equal outcomes and provide unity. Give preferences in jobs and college entrance and in other ways to make up for past sins of white people. What is the problem with this? It is not complete unity because it divides people by race and seeks to conquer racism through racism.

If you buy into this agenda you are woke, which is kind of like a religious conversion. If you don’t agree with their agenda, you are excommunicated or cancelled. The problem is that the people of the “woke” religion see the world through race instead of viewing people according to their character. Forcing equal outcomes through government force or coercion is trying to reach utopia without God. Is there anything wrong with acknowledging past racism or going out of our way to open doors for the disadvantaged? No, that is speaking truth and seeking justice. But if we think we can create a utopia society apart from Jesus we are fooling ourselves and will inadvertently ruin something.

Only God can truly unite all people, and he will when He returns. People will be united through Jesus Christ the King of Kings. In the meantime, the church is called to give the world a glimpse of what is to come by loving and treating all people with love, blessing, and goodwill. We take up justice and mercy and love across all lines that divide people to give people a picture of the kingdom of God where true justice will reign through Christ.

1. Liberal Theology: In liberal churches people compromise the word of God and the moral commands of God to make peace with people who do not believe in Jesus. This is an attempt to love people who don’t believe in Jesus and who are not born again. But making peace without repentance is leaving people in their sin while pretending they are brothers and sisters in the Lord. It sounds loving, but it is hateful to leave someone in danger of God’s judgment when we know better. What Jesus calls for is repentance and we can only know how to repent when we understand how we have offended a holy God.

Unity in Christ begins by understanding that all people of all colors and all social strata are lost in their sin, but they are all welcomed and invited to come repent and trust Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation. We are all in the same condition, and that is what truly unites us. We all need Christ and Christ welcomes all who turn to Him.

A true brother or sister in Christ is one who has repented of their sins and trusted Jesus for salvation. We share the same repentance and adoption and baptism and church family. Have you repented of your sins and self-directed life and trusted Jesus to save you from your sin and bring you to peace with God? If so, Paul commends you as a brother or sister as he did Epaphroditus.

**Fellow Worker**

Paul seems to be very close to Epaphroditus. I have an admission to make. There are some people that I do not naturally connect with or like very much. We connect with some people easier than others. I recall one man who was the head of a missionary organization that I served. I did not like his sarcasm I reacted with defensiveness. He and I had different interests. But here we were stuck working together. We served the Lord together in Mexico and by mentoring disadvantaged youth in Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

After serving together in challenging circumstances we found common ground and powerful spiritual experiences. We saw people come to faith in Christ and celebrated together and did the hard work of disciplining unruly youth. Soon we developed friendly nicknames for each other and a precious fondness grew between us.

Those who drop sweat together tend to bond and experience that brotherhood or sisterhood more than those who do not participate together. If there is someone we do not gravitate toward, it might be a game changer to serve alongside that person.

**Fellow Soldiers**

Fellow soldier is a believer who remembers the Christian life is a spiritual war. Those who share bunkers bond for life. Paul and Epaphroditus fought spiritual battles together. One of the great traps of the devil is to convince us that we are not in a time of spiritual war. There is no battle for souls. Sit back and relax.

FROM TABLE TALK MAGAZINE (Article posted on our Facebook site)

“Throw down those little old guns and toddle off home,” coaxed the voice on the radio. It was World War II, and Nazi Germany employed an American broadcaster, nicknamed “Axis Sally,” to spread propaganda to the U.S. troops. Her radio program, *Home Sweet Home*, toggled between upbeat swing music and demoralizing messages to the armed forces. Sally spun visions of warm fireplaces and sweethearts back home to remind the troops of the good lives they were missing out on compared to their present suffering. Her messages were aired to stir discontentment and homesickness in the soldiers in hope that they would forget victory and long for what was left behind.

In creating this propaganda, the enemy uncovered a force that could derail an army from their mission and undermine any soldier’s resolve. It was not the dread of defeat. It was not even the fear of the battlefield. It was the powerful pull of civilian life.

In a similar way, Paul recognizes the corrosive effect the civilian life can have on the soldier of Christ. In [2 Timothy 2:4](https://www.esv.org/2%20Timothy%202%3A4/), Paul tells the young pastor, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” However, the problem is that Christian soldiers often abandon their posts. They have listened to the propaganda of the enemy that tempts them to give up the suffering at the front lines for the comforts of the good life. Rather than standing fast as battlefield Christians, they have become civilian Christians.”

We must remember that the fight for souls ends only when the Lord returns. We fight for souls together as fellow soldiers.

**Messenger and Minister (to Paul)**

 Sometimes people think of the minister as a different category of person. They minister to others, but we don’t think they need help or encouragement. While it’s true we only want emotionally mature believers to serve as pastors and Christian leaders, Pastors have human needs. I can think of times that I have been very discouraged because I was called to do some very hard things that did not make me popular with most. I think of one time that I felt defeated and one young man approached and said, “Pastor Mike, I am with you no matter what happens because you are preaching God’s word and doing what you said you would do.” His words gave me the courage to complete what I was called to do.

 I’m sure it was the same for Paul. Epaphroditus ministered to the Apostle Paul. Can you image ministering to the greatest minister we can think of? What an honor and blessing.

**26Indeed, he greatly missed all of you and was distressed because you heard that he had been ill. 27In fact he became so ill that he nearly died. But God showed mercy to him—and not to him only, but also to me—so that I would not have grief on top of grief.**

**28Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you can rejoice and I can be free from anxiety.**

 Paul was distressed because this church was greatly concerned with the health of Epaphroditus and the wellbeing of Paul. They could not text one another with updates. Paul wanted to assure the congregation that all was well. Paul wanted to resolve the anxiety.

**29So welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, 30since it was because of the work of Christ that he almost died. He risked his life so that he could make up for your inability to serve me.**

 Welcome him with great joy and honor people like him. They will be naturally joyful to see him appear in good health. And he will be welcomed home like a war hero because he is doing the work of a Christian soldier who risked his life for the sake of the gospel and to serve the Apostle Paul.

 This congregation was unable to send people or resources to help Paul while in prison. We cannot help everyone and answer every urgent call. But we can pray earnestly and support those who do take up hard callings for the sake of the gospel.

**SUMMARY / CHALLENGE**

Today we learned that the world and false churches attempt to create unity and utopia apart from Jesus Christ. But all efforts to unify people apart from the return of Christ will fall short. We learned that we are called to be brothers and sisters, fellow workers and laborers and even fellow soldiers in Christ. And we are called to minister to one another. We have a high calling to show the unity to the world that will take place in its fulness when Jesus returns.

**TAKING IT HOME**

1. Who are you encouraging and ministering to?
2. Does your life give people a glimpse of the true unity found in Christ’s return?
3. Does our church welcome all people from any background?