

Philippians in Ten

Week Five: Paul Remaps Our Thinking

Readings:

Phil 2: 19-30, Phil 3: 1: 1-17, Phil 4: 10-18

Recap

Jesus is the supreme example of the alternative way of life that Paul sets out for the Philippians. But he also points to Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Timothy is “deeply concerned about the Philippians.” Timothy is someone who is following the example of Christ that Paul had talked about earlier in the chapter – he was looking out for the interests of others.

Epaphroditus was willing to risk his life for the sake of Paul and his community. Like Timothy, he showed genuine concern for others; both were prepared to put their very lives on the line for others.

Paul also points to himself as an example to follow. He had suffered the loss of “all things,” living a life of considerable hardship for the sake of the gospel. After setting out his Jewish credentials in chapter 3, he says he counts all these things he once thought of as advantages and assets as liabilities. In fact, he now counts everything as simply rubbish, or filth, for “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Although Paul knows he's not perfect, he says he is striving to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of him. He's aware of his shortcomings, but that doesn't stop him from, as he says in 3:13, being single-minded in his pursuit of all that God has for him. Which ultimately is Christ himself.

We see more of Paul as an example for the Philippians to follow toward the end of chapter 4.

He says he's learned to be content in any circumstance. Whatever his situation, Paul says he had learned the secret of contentment. He was able to contend with everything, including the hunger and lack “through the one who strengthens me.” This is a statement of great faith by someone who is in a very difficult situation.

It's clear to the Philippians that what Paul says about himself in chapters 3 and 4 are not empty words. They've seen him live them. So, it will have been no surprise to them when he says in verse 15 that the Philippians ought to think the same way as he does. “Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way.”

The lives of Epaphroditus, Timothy and Paul exemplified:

- being concerned primarily about others rather than themselves
- being utterly focused on Christ and devoted to him, wanting above all to know him
- trusting God for each and every circumstance that came their way, good or ill.

This is what living in God's alternative kingdom looks like. This is what witnessing to a more fundamental reality looks like. It's saying Jesus's kingdom is worth more of our time, our attention, our resources than anything in this world.

Questions to Consider

How does Paul relate the example of Timothy back to the early verses of chapter 2 and the Christ hymn?

Reading between the lines, considering where Paul was and the context of Paul's world, can you piece together what happened to Epaphroditus?

Are there practical ways in which we can follow the example of both Timothy and Epaphroditus in our world?

What did it mean for Paul to "suffer the loss of all things"?

What impression are you left with about Paul thinking about what he says about his attitude to his fine Jewish heritage and then his desire to "know Christ."

What can we learn from Paul's example from 4: 11-12? How can we be "content in all circumstances"? What stops us from this?

Making our aim to know Christ better: What in our world conspires to make us think like everyone else? How do we avoid being "squeezed into that same old mould."

Paul calls us the "think in the same way" as Epaphroditus, Timothy and himself. In order to do that, what things ought we to be careful about? And positively, how can we encourage our thinking to be better conformed to the values of Christ's alternative kingdom?