

Introduction: We give thanks that our God is a God who delights to pour His life into in His people and that He is the Author and Sustainer of all spiritual work in each member of the covenant community. Just as Paul was joyfully willing to be sacrificed for the sake of Gospel (Philippians 2:17-18), knowing that nothing could separate him from the life he had in Christ, so he celebrates the work of Christ in Timothy and Epaphroditus, who are living examples of the indwelling Spirit of God (Philippians 2:13). By that Spirit, they are enabled to put the spiritual interests of the church before their own – just as Paul had exhorted the Philippians to do in Philippians 2:1-5.

But what a tedious and costly labor is always involved in such Gospel work! We tend to forget the *number of journeys*, for example, which went into Paul and his co-worker's labors to ensure that congregations like the Philippians were encouraged and guarded in Christ. This week's notes should make us appreciate the cost of such labor.

### **Mon/Tues: Read Philippians 2:13, 2:19-24 & 1 Thessalonians 3:1-8. God is Portable**

One comforting implication of the indwelling of God in each believer, proving that we have in fact been redeemed to be indwelt," is that *God is now portable* in His care for us.

Just as the Lord travelled with His people in the desert for forty years, tenting with them, cooking manna for them and appearing at the rock from which they obtained outpourings of miraculous water, so He travels with us now, indwelling us even in the darkest valleys and in the midst of the searing heat of our trials. This portability is seen in God's use of Timothy to bring Gospel encouragements to various churches under the Apostle's care.

For example, when Paul was afraid that all of his Gospel labor would turn out to be in vain in one of the first congregations to be called into being in Macedonia, the Thessalonians, he sent Timothy to bring back news on how the Thessalonians were coping in the midst of persecution. What a resurrection of hope for Paul as Timothy returned with the refreshing news that the work of the Spirit continued in that church! Paul and those with him "lived" when they found out the Thessalonians were standing fast in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8). He now had solid proof via Timothy's testimony, that God dwelled with blessing in Thessalonica even when the Apostle could not be there with this baby church.

Isn't this exactly how God's plan through Timothy is meant to function in Philippians 2:19-24?

*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.*

**Meditate and Pray:** Let us give thanks that, when God works to raise up Gospel witness for His glory in a country, region or city, He most often works through multiple servants of the Lord, who are meant to bring mutual encouragement to each other. Ask the Lord of the church to protect the congregations in our regional groupings, called presbyteries, as well as to protect the bonds of fellowship which we share with fraternal churches, such as in Quebec. May the Lord Jesus walk in the midst of these candlesticks to encourage each that they are not alone and not forgotten. Sing about such bonds of loving service which Paul and Timothy share with both the Thessalonians and Philippians, using hymn # 353 in our Red Trinity Hymnal:

1 I love thy kingdom, Lord,  
the house of thine abode,  
the church our blest Redeemer saved  
with his own precious blood.

2 I love thy church, O God:  
her walls before thee stand,  
dear as the apple of thine eye,  
and graven on thy hand.

3 For her my tears shall fall,  
for her my prayers ascend;  
to her my cares and toils be giv'n,  
till toils and cares shall end.

4 Beyond my highest joy  
I prize her heav'nly ways,  
her sweet communion, solemn vows,  
her hymns of love and praise.

5 Jesus, thou Friend divine,  
Our Savior and our King,  
thy hand from ev'ry snare and foe  
shall great deliv'rance bring.

6 Sure as thy truth shall last,  
to Zion shall be giv'n  
the brightest glories earth can yield,  
and brighter bliss of heav'n.

### **Weds/Thurs/Fri: Read Philippians 2:25-30                      Disappointments**

While it is easy to see God working through the gifted and praised Timothy in his work for the church, it is harder to see God's hand working through Epaphroditus. After all, his story does not contain the success which Timothy had. Could there be some awkwardness welcoming this son of the church back to Philippi when his time with Paul had been cut off by illness?

We can identify with Epaphroditus, can't we? Sometimes it seems that God lays us low with illness and potential tragedy *right when we could be of so much use to the Lord*. In fact, I don't think I have ever met a believing parent or grandparent who, when unable to continue the work of raising their children or grandchildren in the faith because of illness or even imminent death, have sat back with satisfaction and said, "My work here is finished." Sickness and thorns in the flesh are often Satanic in the sense of failure and incomplete labors for the Lord which they bring upon our discouraged hearts.

The Philippians were probably hoping, perhaps even expecting, to see Timothy arrive with news from Paul; the sight of Epaphroditus would in some ways be a disappointment to them. Further, when anyone returns home unexpectedly early from their sphere of Christian service, questions are often asked in whispered tones; knowing comments are made behind their backs. That is the experience of many missionaries today, and it was potentially the case with Epaphroditus too.

Was there a feeling in the early church, as there often seems to be among contemporary Christians, that those who are engaged in so-called full-time Christian service should be immune from the problems others face? Did Paul suspect that some Philippians might feel that Epaphroditus was a spiritual failure? Was he fearful that there might be the occasional snide comment: "Some people don't seem to be able to handle the pressures"? ... Perhaps Paul feared for Epaphroditus' good reputation and the future acceptance of his ministry in Philippi.

Sinclair Ferguson Ch 16, *Let's Study Philippians*

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask God to make us patient with afflicted and downcast Christians. May the Lord help us not to make hasty judgments as to who are "successful Christians" and who are "failures." May we learn to magnify Christ, who uses clay pots such as ourselves, and not to adulate the mere messenger more than our mighty Savior!

**Sat/Sun: Read Philippians 2:25-30 & Psalm 145:5-9 Tender Mercies**

We are *dependent on God's miraculous power* for the resurrection and ascension of our Savior, for the supernatural new birth in our lives, and the amazing wonder of saving faith planted in us by the miracle-working Holy Spirit. We are *also daily in need of fresh mercies from God's providence and care*. Even when no miraculous Divine work is visible to us, God is working in a thousand ways to ensure that His providential mercy is "over all His works." (Psalm 145:9)

Even in the Apostolic Age, when there were great signs and wonders, God used daily, providential mercies – rather than only working through the miraculous. Take note that there is no miraculous healing of Epaphroditus when he is taken ill on his mission to care for the mighty Apostle in Rome. Could not Paul have done a great miracle to heal this brother near death? The number of faithful workers at his first imprisonment in Rome is scant, as a comparison of Philippians 2:20-21 with 2 Timothy 4:16 makes clear. Epaphroditus is such an urgently-needed fellow-worker for the Apostle! Yet, there is no record of a miracle of healing in Philippians, although Paul does miracles in other places, such as Ephesus (Acts 19:11); Lystra (Acts 14:8) and before the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 12:12).

Those miracles were meant to be signs of Paul's apostolic authority. But when it came to Paul's personal desires, an Apostle could not, as our Lord would not, work miracles for his own needs. Neither Paul nor Peter could, by a mighty deed, escape martyrdom any more than Jesus would escape miraculously from the death of the Cross.

How wonderful then was God's healing of Epaphroditus - not because of a dramatic apostolic wonder, but simply out of divine mercy (Philippians 2:27). This, then, is the way God answered Paul's anguished prayers for this brother's healing. God had mercy on Paul and spared Epaphroditus. Why? Because God is faithful in His providence and did not want to add "sorrow upon sorrow" onto the shoulders of the Apostle Paul (Philippians 2:27).

**Meditate and Pray:** Be encouraged, dear believer, when you face "sorrow upon sorrow." God knows how to apply His tender mercies (Psalm 145:9) to all His works in our lives – especially when we come to an end of our rope and cannot take further sorrow. May the Lord deal gently with us at such times, even as hymn # 676 promises:

1 Day by day and with each passing moment,  
strength I find to meet my trials here;  
trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,  
I've no cause for worry or for fear.  
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure  
gives unto each day what he deems best—  
lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,  
mingling toil with peace and rest.

2 Every day, the Lord himself is near me  
with a special mercy for each hour;  
all my cares he fain would bear, and cheer me,  
he whose name is Counselor and Pow'r.  
The protection of his child and treasure  
is a charge that on himself he laid:  
"As your days, your strength shall be in measure,"  
this the pledge to me he made.