

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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TWO GOOD MEN AND FEW DOGS

Philippians 2:19 – 3:6

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I have three points to my message today:

- Timothy was known for his genuine care.
- Epaphroditus was known for his hard work.
- The dogs were known for stirring up trouble.

INTRODUCTION: The Apostle Paul was in jail and was awaiting trial. He had done nothing but preach the Gospel, but the Gospel was so new and contrary to the religions of the day that the authorities felt threatened by it.

Paul was in a Roman jail and his original accusers from Jerusalem would not be there to face him, but their charges would be presented.

Paul decided to write a letter to the church at Philippi. He knew that God would be faithful, and he had hope that despite the difficult days that faced him, he would be able visit people in Philippi again someday. He loved the people in this church. They were doing things right. They weren't caught up with a bunch of negative issues.

We left off in chapter two verse 18 where he talked about grumbling and arguing. We'll pick up at verse 19.

TIMOTHY WAS KNOWN FOR HIS GENUINE CARE

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:19-24

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 will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their 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.*

EXPLANATION: Since Paul could not go to the church at Philippi, he planned to send his most trusted disciple, Timothy. Timothy was loyal to Paul and the cause of Christ and so Paul knew he could help the church.

Listen to Paul's strong language:

- *“For I have no one else like him.”*
 - *“Everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”*
- Paul sees Timothy as an exception to the rule.

Even in first century A.D., people looked out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. Times have not really changed, have they? People tend to look out for number one. It's important to note Paul's description of Timothy and to emulate Timothy's example. His testimony spoke for itself.

Jesus did not save us to turn us into egotistical superstars. When we are saved, we are to empty ourselves of our ego and put on the spirit of Christ. This requires constant and ongoing reminders.

ILLUSTRATION: A few times, I've asked people outside of the churches I served to come and share their testimonies. Of course, I never want to be chintzy, and I want to take care of people. On at least two occasions, I asked people who had a minimum charge to come and share their testimony. They were just people who I thought had interesting testimonies that we'd like to hear. One man wanted \$1,500, and a woman – who lives locally – said she'd send her rider-agreement. At that point, I discontinued the conversation.

Folks, your testimony is not for sale. Contrast these people with Timothy, who Paul viewed as one who had set aside his ego and put on the role of a genuine, caring servant who looked out for others' interests.

EPAPHRODITUS WAS KNOWN FOR HIS HARD WORK

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:25-30

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-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 So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

EXPLANATION: Epaphroditus was a common name in this day but this was an uncommon man. He was sent by the Philippian church to be an aid to Paul. When I read about him, he reminds me of that highly resourceful person you know who has a lot of contacts, knows how to handle challenges, and stays on task until the work is done. Apparently, this man almost worked himself to death and Paul decided it was time for him to go home. It wasn't that Paul was ungrateful, but Paul believed Epaphroditus' work was done. Also, Paul needed someone to deliver his letter to them.

Here we see Paul's compassion. He recognized Epaphroditus' good work but wasn't going to let this good man work himself to death. We all need someone in our lives who cares enough to tell us when we need to slow down. I know of a couple who left a church because the pastor worked them to the bone. It's easy to prey on people who are not good at saying no.

Later on in chapter 4, we see there was a dispute. It must have been a bad one because Paul found out about it, probably by letter. It's possible that another reason Paul sent Epaphroditus home was because he would know how to help settle the dispute. No doubt Epaphroditus learned how to handle difficult situations while living with Paul.

Let's look back at chapter two as a whole. You'll notice the first part is dedicated to a serious talk about putting on the mindset of Christ. The middle section deals with grumbling and arguing, then the last section has two examples of men who

put on the mind of Christ. The image that came to my mind is a sandwich: teachings against grumbling and arguing sandwiched between teaching of the mindset and spirit of Christ. There is a very interesting sequence to Paul's reasoning here.

Let's move on to chapter 3: Paul tells people to guard against the flesh. Any time we say the word flesh in spiritual matters, it is always meant in a negative way. Acts of the flesh are acts of the sinful nature.

THE DOGS WERE KNOWN FOR STIRRING UP TROUBLE

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:1-4

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

EXPLANATION: Paul was calling the Judaizers “dogs”... not a flattering term by any means. Judaizers believed that Gentiles had to be circumcised and had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul had encountered these folks at Antioch and Galatia. They caused problems everywhere he went.

Since I've mentioned the Judaizers numerous times in my messages, I've thought about why they were so resistant to salvation by grace. Here are my thoughts:

- (1) Salvation by grace *sounded* really easy to those who spent their lives adhering strictly to the Law of Moses. They assumed they were doing something for themselves in the spiritual realm. If they had merely let go of their own spiritual pride and studied the Gospel message, they would have realized their adherence to the law was only intended to point out their own sin and need for a Savior. They would have realized that Jesus' death on the cross was not easy and that no one deserves salvation.

- (2) Another reason I believe the Judaizers were resistant to salvation by grace is because salvation based on works helps people become proud of their accomplishments instead of the humble prayer, “God have mercy on me a sinner.” Telling someone there is a new way, and a better way, is not good news to everyone.
- (3) Another reason I believe the Judaizers resisted salvation by grace is because it provided a form of security for them. “I’ve checked all the boxes.” But it was nothing more than a false sense of security.

In the scripture, Paul referenced Christians as being of the circumcision, not literally, but spiritually. Look at verse 4:

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:4-6

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

EXPLANATION: Paul had every reason to boast. Before his conversion, he had done everything required of the law. I mean, he really did it right. He did it so well that he killed those who believed differently and thought he was doing God a favor as a murderer, until God knocked him down on the road to Damascus.

He called the Judaizers dogs because they were perverting the simple message of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ. They did nothing but stir up trouble. Can you envision them, as I can? Men who plotted and planned to stir up trouble. Arrogant men who insisted there had to be more to the Gospel. Men who worked to get a following of people. Men who didn’t want the Gentiles in the church. What a mess.

In the today’s message, Paul highlights two men by their names:

- Timothy, the one known for caring for others more than himself.
- Epaphroditus, the servant known for almost losing his life for the cause of Christ.

Then Paul highlights a group known as dogs who pervert the Gospel. He doesn't bother giving their names. It was one of those you-know-who-you-are-and-who-I-am-talking-about statements.

It's clear Paul wanted the people in the church at Philippi to be like Timothy, kind and caring, and like Epaphroditus, the hard worker and problem-solver. He did not want them to be nameless dogs.

This is a good word for us today. There are a lot of distractions out there. If you've been listening to my preaching very long, and if you've studied the scripture on your own for very long, your ability to discern should be maturing. Either you repent of sin and follow Christ, or you don't.

May we serve others, may we work hard, and may we avoid distracting people and distracting teaching.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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