

Men Who Model Christ

Philippians 2:17-24

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As just a reminder, Philippians 2, which we're going to wrap up tonight, is basically joy in spite of people. Chapter 1 is joy in spite of circumstances, and by having joy in spite of circumstances we have joy by having a single mind that no matter what happens to us in circumstances of life, as long as Christ is magnified in our bodies, we can rejoice. In Philippians 2, Paul is pleading for them to have unity in verses 1-4; in verses 5-11, he gives us the pattern for unity in the Person of Jesus Christ, and we spent a couple of weeks looking at the kenosis passage; in verses 12-16, we see the power where Paul says, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"; in verses 17-30, we now see the proof. We see the plea, the pattern, the power, and we see the proof of what it means to walk in humility and sacrificial service.

A lot of times people separate verses 17-30 from the rest of the chapter, and that's a big mistake. If you look at the context of Philippians 2 and how it all fits together, it's pretty marvelous, and it opens up the passage. Philippians is not a formal treatise but it is organized, so Paul is writing a personal thank-you letter to the Philippians and wants to reconnect with them and thank them for their missionary support, but it does have form and order.

In Philippians 2, where Paul is talking in verse 5, let's go back there for just a moment, he said, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." We looked at that thoroughly for a couple of weeks, but the theme there, the mind of Christ, is the attitude or outlook of sacrificial service—Jesus left Heaven, came to earth, took on humanity, died voluntarily on the cross, was buried, resurrected from the dead, ascended back into Heaven. Jesus is our example.

What Paul does is use himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as examples of the mind of Christ. He exhorts us in verse 5, "Let this mind," outlook or attitude, "be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," and we might think, Well, how could I ever attain that? He was the Son of God. He was God incarnate. I could never be like Christ. Paul says, "Look at me as an example, look at Timothy as an example, and look at Epaphroditus as an example." Three individuals that we can maybe relate to a little bit more than Jesus and understanding that I can have the sacrificial, self-denying service toward others thus I can have joy in spite of people.

The first is Paul, verses 17-18. Let's read it. Paul says, "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me." Go back with me to verse 16. Paul says, "Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Paul says, "I'm rejoicing in my ministry among you, that I haven't run in vain, I haven't labored in

vain,” and without skipping a beat, verse 17, he actually says, “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith,” referring to the believers in Philippi, then it brings me, “joy, and rejoicing with you all. 18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.”

There are two things that Paul mentions: his life as an offering, verse 17, and then his joy and rejoicing, end of verse 17-18. Remember the theme in Philippians is joy and rejoicing in Christ. About 19 times you find the word “joy” or “rejoice.” These two things are quite interesting. He talks about serving and his labor not being in vain, verse 16, and then talks about his offering and his life being a sacrifice of service upon their faith. This phrase in verse 17, “offering,” actually gives the picture of what is known as a drink offering. It’s a picture of the priest taking a glass of wine and pouring it on the altar of sacrifice, or they would also take what is called a libation and pour it on the ground. It would go into the soil and couldn’t be recovered, so it was a sacrifice. They had what was called a libation or drink offering, so they take the wine, pour it on the sacrifice, and if it were being barbecued, the steam would go up and dissipate in the air, or he would pour it into the dirt.

Paul is picturing his life as a sacrificial outpouring, as a libation, “I’m giving my life in service for you.” Again, as I said, it ties in with verse 16, that in his ministry among them, “...that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain...and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” When he uses the words “sacrifice” and “service,” verse 17, he’s picturing his life being poured out in this drink offering as the ministry of the priest. It’s a sacrificial imagery and picture, but the application is true of us as well because notice the result is, “...joy, and rejoice with you all.” In verse 18 he says, “For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me,” so if you give your life in sacrificial service, there’ll be joy and rejoicing; if I give my life upon your faith, and this is their Christian belief and the way they lived their Christian life and the ministry he had among them, he says it brings joy.

We sometimes will play a game of word association. It works like if I say a word, then you think of the first word that comes to mind. If you use this verse...I’ve always thought it fascinating where Paul uses these two words in verse 17, “sacrifice” and “service.” When I say the word “sacrifice,” what comes to your mind? Bummer, bummer, bummer. Right? “Please don’t ask me to sacrifice.” When I think of the word “service,” what’s the first thing that pops into your mind? “Oh no! They’re going to ask me to do something.” Who goes rushing in when the announcement is made, “We need someone to sacrifice and serve.” “Well, I’m sorry. I’ve got a dental appointment. I need to leave right now.” In this very same verse, you find another two words, “joy” and “rejoice.” You find the words “sacrifice” and “service,” and “joy” and “rejoice.”

Isn’t this interesting. This is absolutely the antithesis or the contrast of what the world thinks. The world thinks when people serve you, sacrifice for you, and minister to you that it’s going to bring you joy. The Scriptures are the opposite. When we sacrifice for others, serve others, and give ourselves to others, guess what the result is? It’s joy. If you want to be miserable, I could do a Bible study on how to be miserable, think about yourself, meditate on yourself, talk about yourself, do everything for yourself, find yourself. People always say, “I’ve gotta find myself.” “Why?! If you ever do, you’re going to be grossed out.” “I found myself, and it wasn’t pretty.”

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Where did He go? He went to Jerusalem to die. He's carrying a cross. He says, "You want to follow Me? I'm going to be crucified. Do you want to follow Me? I had nails driven through My hands and feet, you want to follow Me?" "Well, I don't know. I think I would rather take up my Cadillac and drive the other direction." I've always just really loved this statement here, "If I be poured out like a glass of wine, poured into the soil," and when that's poured into the soil it's gone, you can't scoop it back up, "my life is poured out." Remember where Paul is writing these words? In prison, technically under house arrest in Rome, but he had chains on his ankles and wrists, he was awaiting trial before wicked Caesar Nero, and he had no assurance that he would live beyond his trial. He could be executed. He says, "Look, if I'm poured out, if my life is dumped out as a sacrifice, then I joy and I rejoice."

Remember earlier in Philippians 1 Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," so for Paul it was all about Jesus. It was all about others. It was all about sacrificial service. Is there any wonder that Paul had joy? Is there any wonder we don't have joy because it's all about, "Who's gonna serve me? Who's gonna help me? Who's gonna cater to me? Who's gonna meet my needs, talk to me and be nice to me? Who's gonna have me over for dinner? Who's gonna take care of me?" We forget that when we think about ourselves, forget others, we lose our joy, we lose our rejoicing. Paul says the same thing applies to you in Philippi, verse 18.

In those two little verses, verses 17-18, Paul is talking about being poured out like a sacrificial service upon their faith. What a blessing it is when we as believers can say, "Lord, take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Lord, take my life and use it for Your glory. Make me a blessing, make me a blessing, out of my life may Jesus shine." Die to self and live for Christ in serving others.

Here's the second example. There's a little bit more involved here, verses 19-24. It's one of my favorite Bible characters. His name is Timothy. The name means one who honors God. He was a protege of Paul and a young pastor. Look at verse 19. Paul says, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus," or Timothy "shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. 20 For I have no man likeminded," referring to Timothy, "who will naturally care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. 22 But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. 23 Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me," but again he makes the statement, "But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly," again to you.

Now, we're introduced to Timothy. In our New Testament we have two little epistles of 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. Those are written to this young man, Timothy, who Paul picked up on a second missionary journey, Acts 16, and he traveled with Paul and became one of Paul's disciples as Paul mentored him and he became a pastor. As I said, his name means one who honors God. His mother's name was Eunice. She was a Jewess. His grandmother's name was Lois. His father was a Greek or a Gentile, so he was part Jew, part Gentile, and he had

been taught the Scriptures from the time he was a young boy. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul says, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation," so he probably met Paul in Lystra on his first missionary journey and was converted and became Paul's protege and a pastor at a very early age.

Later on, Paul's second journey in Acts 16, Timothy joined Paul and by this time was well-reported of by the brethren and became a pastor. One of the reasons I like Timothy so much is because he was a pastor. I am a pastor, so I like pastors. I think they're pretty cool, and I have a heart to encourage pastors because I know the challenges and the trials and the difficulties that pastors face. It's so great. Paul wrote to Timothy and had these issues in his life—he was young and part Jew, part Gentile, so he had social problems to face, and he was timid and fearful. This is why Paul wrote to him and said, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example," and "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." That word "fear" is timidity, so he was young and timid.

I remember when I was just very young and starting to pastor. I remember being intimidated by older people who came to the church. I was only 19 or 20 years old when I started to preach. I remember one time somebody in their 30's showed up and I said, "Some old guy's here tonight. He must be 30!" Obviously, that doesn't happen anymore.

Timothy was timid and needed to be encouraged. He had social and emotional problems. Believe it or not, he had physical problems. He was often sick. This is why in the Bible, every wino-type person knows this verse in the Bible, "...use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." I've had them quote it to me many times. I might point out that that's for medicinal purposes. That was medicine for them, water was dangerous, they used it for medicating themselves. Evidently, Timothy had an upset stomach so he said, "...use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." He didn't say, "Pastoral ministry is very difficult. Drink wine to help you out." No. He said, "You've got that stomach problem? Drink a little wine for your stomach's sake. Use it for medicinal purposes."

Remember God can use us even in our weaknesses. In 2 Corinthians 12, I love it where Paul says, "...when I am weak, then am I strong." Even in our weaknesses, frailties, and infirmities, God can still use us.

Let's look at this passage, and I'll try not to clutter it up. I love this section on Timothy. He says, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus," I don't know if you noticed it, but at the end of this section on Timothy, verse 24, what do we find again? "But I trust in the Lord," so it opens in verse 19, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus," and closes in verse 24, "But I trust in the Lord." I love the fact that here's Paul in prison, in chains, he doesn't know what the future holds, whether or not he'll be put to death or released and be able to go back to ministry, but says, "No matter what happens, I trust in the Lord Jesus."

There's an old hymn that we used to sing. We don't sing it here at Revival because we don't do that many hymns, but it had the chorus, Trust and obey, for there's no other way, To be happy in

Jesus, but to trust and obey. How many of you have heard that song? Everybody over 60 just raised their hands. Do you know it's really a profound concept, Trust and obey, for there's no other way, To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. Just keep trusting and obeying the Lord, and God will provide, guide, and take care of you.

I love the fact that Paul makes reference to, "I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus," Timothy, and that I myself may also come shortly. "I'm going to send Timothy now, and as soon as I hear what happens with me, I'll send him; but I'm also trusting that God will release me and I'll be able to go and be free and come to you and minister to you." "...send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort," notice that, "when I know your state." Paul wanted to get a report on the believers in Philippi, so he's going to send Timothy, who's with him, to Philippi; and he's hoping that Philippi can then send him back and he can get a report and be comforted.

I want you to notice some qualities of this young man Timothy that are found in this passage. There are five of them to be exact. In verse 20 we see, referring to Timothy, "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." Quality one, he was likeminded with the apostle Paul. That word "likeminded" is a fascinating phrase. It literally means of a kindred spirit. "He's one spirit with me, of a kindred spirit. I feel this oneness with this man, Timothy." It's interesting that Paul had many other traveling companions, many other associates, many people that he mentored and disciplined, but evidently, right here, right now at this time, only Timothy was the one that he could call on and trust in to run this errand who was of a kindred spirit.

It's interesting that Paul said, "I have no one of a kindred spirit." I wonder, where's Dr. Luke? Where's Aristarchus? Where's Cephas or Gaius? Where's John Mark? I don't know. Maybe they hadn't gotten to Rome yet? Maybe they had been sent on an errand. I don't know, but he only had Timothy.

In this whole passage, it does reinforce the concept that it's important to have kindred spirits in the Lord. I think it's important for men to have other men in their lives that love the Lord, love God's Word, and that there's a kindred spirit there. I think it's important for women to have other women who can mentor, encourage, and disciple them and are of a kindred spirit. When I sometimes have people come to me with issues and problems and I'm counseling them, I'll say, "Do you have a good Christian friend?" Nine times out of ten, "Well, no, not really. I come to church only occasionally and haven't connected with anybody. I don't know anybody." You can't do it by yourself. You need a kindred spirit. You need somebody who will pray with you, pray for you. You need someone, "as iron sharpens iron," to get plugged into the men's fellowship for the guys, the women's Bible study for the women, small group, life group, whatever it might be. You can't do it by yourself. You need somebody that is of a kindred spirit, someone that you can pray with.

When I was a young Christian, all the way through my Christian life, God brought individuals into my life to encourage, challenge me, for me to fellowship with, for me to minister to them

and them to me, so you need that interaction. You need somebody to pray with and someone who is of a kindred spirit. I love this concept that Timothy and that no one else qualified to be this kindred spirit with Paul.

The second quality of Timothy's character was that he genuinely cared, verse 20. He alone, "...who will naturally," which is actually a reference to sincerely or genuinely or authentically, "care for your state." Keep this in mind. Back in verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," right? "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation," humbled Himself, emptied Himself, "and took upon him the form of a servant," this is an example of that. You don't have to be the Son of God incarnate, you can be someone like Timothy, with all of his faults, frailties, and weaknesses; yet God can use you, if you're a caring Christian. He says he will comfort you, but says he's "...likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." I love that. The same word is used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:28 where he talks about the care of all the churches that weighs on him daily. We should care for the church; we should care for others.

Notice the third quality. Not only is Timothy like-minded with Paul, genuinely concerned or caring for other believers, but thirdly, he was not self-seeking. He says, verse 21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," again, back in Philippians 2:4, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others," so don't be focusing on your concerns and your interests, but be focusing on the concerns and the interests of others. Again, that's what's seen in the man, Timothy, where he's not seeking his own. He was selfless.

These are great qualities you ought to note and pray that God would incorporate into your life: that you have a kindred spirit with somebody, you're genuinely caring, you're not self-seeking, and, fourthly, that he lived for Christ. He says, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," in other words, everybody I know is just in it for themselves, doing what they want for themselves, self-centered, self-focused, and self-seeking, but not Timothy. He's not living for self or for his own interests, he's living for others. He's a true servant of and like Jesus Christ. We should ask ourselves: Am I seeking the things of Christ? Am I living to serve others?

Fifthly, verse 22, Timothy was described as a servant, "But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel." Notice he says, "...ye know the proof of him." That word "proof" there means Timothy had passed the test of time—he'd been serving the Lord sacrificially, self-denyingly, he denied himself and ministered to others. He was proven. The Bible says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man," that they should be first proven. Timothy was proven by testing, trials, and his life of sacrificial service qualified him to be pastor and a servant of the Lord. He was known as a servant, which is, again, those who give themselves to minister to others. Notice he also was, "...as a son with the father," this is the Paul and Timothy relationship, like a son would serve his father, "he hath served with me in the gospel."

Notice Paul says, "...he hath served with me in the gospel," not that he necessarily served me, but with me. Even the great apostle Paul saw that this protege Timothy was equal with him as a teammate serving the Lord together. This is another very important quality for those who want to be Christ-like and serve the Lord—that you need to do it with others, you need to participate serving together. You can't go kind of loose cannon and do it on your own, but we work together. We serve together. We're a part of the body of Christ. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee," and I love the fact that Paul said, "...he hath served with me," and served "in the gospel."

We at Revival Christian Fellowship should be serving the Lord together. We may not be the hand, we may not be the foot or the eye, we may be a part of the body that's less seen or known or recognized, but we're all necessary and important and work together for one common goal, that is, to get out the gospel of Jesus Christ, verse 22.

Paul goes on to say, "Him," that is, Timothy, "therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me," Paul's referring to his trial before Nero. "I'm trusting the Lord, and I don't know for sure how it's going to go; but as soon as I do know, I'm going to send Timothy," and then says, "But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly," I love that. Paul ends this section on a positive note, "I'm going to send Timothy, but I'm just believing God, I'm trusting God, I'm hoping in the Lord that I'm going to be able to come myself as well." What a blessing it is to trust and obey when we're serving the Lord together with others.

Here's the third and last individual. This is one of the least known people in the Bible. His name is Epaphroditus. He was a Gentile. His name means favored by Aphrodite, but some believe that his name means charming. I'm looking forward to, when I get to Heaven, not just seeing Paul, Peter, James and John, and Isaiah, Daniel, David. I want to meet Epaphroditus. I want to ask him questions about this verse that's in the Bible. I want to meet some of these lesser known people in the Bible because they're just interesting. It's interesting that Jesus was the Son of God, Paul was an apostle called by God, Timothy was a pastor called to that pastoral ministry and used by God, Epaphroditus we would call a layman, not a lame man, but a layman. In other words, he wasn't a clergyman or ordained minister. He wasn't an apostle. He was just a servant of Jesus Christ but used so marvelously. Such is the case with many of us today.

Let's read the passage. Paul says, "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus," so he says, "I'm going to send Timothy as soon as I find out how it's going with me. I hope that I'll be released and I can come see you, too. I'm also going to send Epaphroditus." He describes him, and we'll come back to this, "my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. 26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. 27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I sent him therefore the more carefully," or urgently, "that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. 29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation," or honor him,

“Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.” This is a great, great wrap up in Philippians 2 of the humble mind seen in Christ, seen in Paul, seen in Timothy, and now seen in this man called Epaphroditus.

Let’s go back over these verses, and in verse 25 we have Epaphroditus’ character. He’s called, “...my brother, and companion in labour,” he’s called a “fellow soldier...messenger...and he that ministered to my wants.” This is a description of the character of Epaphroditus. “...my brother,” I love that concept. He’s part of the family of God. We’re brothers and sisters in Christ. Then, “...and my companion,” which carries the idea of co-worker. Paul, even though an apostle, knew of the importance of working together with others in ministry, so he’s “...my brother,” in Christ, “and companion.” I do believe that we should serve the Lord together as brothers and sisters in Christ. I love this here. He’s called a “...fellow soldier.” He’s a brother, which speaks of their fellowship; he’s my companion, which speaks of being a co-worker; and then “...fellow soldier,” so he’s a “...companion in labour,” but we’re also companions in spiritual battles, spiritual warfare.

One of the things that I have discovered over the years of ministry that really knit your heart together with other believers is serving the Lord together and battling in the battles of the spiritual world together—doing spiritual ministry together and spiritual warfare and battling together as soldiers. Have you ever noticed the camaraderie and brotherhood that soldiers have? Men that have fought together on the battlefield, how they love each other? The same is true in the ministry of the church. People that we’ve prayed with, cried with, served with, and sacrificed with, traveled with, worked together with, they are fellow soldiers; and we’re facing the enemy in battling together where there’s a real camaraderie and fellowship. He is a brother, co-worker, and also a fellow soldier and then says, “...he that ministered to my wants,” so he’s a servant. Again, all of those are great descriptions of this beautiful man known as Epaphroditus.

In speaking of his concern, verses 26-28, it says, “For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye heard that he had been sick.” You might be a little confused at this point about who is this Epaphroditus and this personal kind of interaction that’s going on with Paul and the believers in Philippi. Turn with me back to Philippians 4:18. He’s mentioned again at the end of the book. Paul says, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. 19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Paul’s mentioning in Philippians 4:18 is that they had sent Epaphroditus from the church in Philippi, which was about an 800-mile trip. This is not you get on an airplane and sit in coach and have flight attendants bring you sodas and snacks. This is 800 miles of rigorous travel—walking, maybe donkey, maybe boat, and other means if they have it, mostly walking—to bring this offering from Philippi to Paul. What happened was is the church in Philippi found out Paul was in prison. I’ve mentioned it before, but he’s in a hired house, so he’s paying rent, he has expenses, so they took up an offering in Philippi and needed to get it to Paul. How do you get it to Paul? They can’t electronically send it. They can’t wire it. They have to physically carry the

money itself all the way to Rome. They must've said, "Who's going to take it?" It doesn't say in the passage, but my guess is either he was asked by the leaders of the church or he raised his hand and volunteered. Everybody else says, "Well, I like you, but I can't do it. I've got this," or "I've got that," and "I'm busy here," or "I'm busy there. You know, that's going to take months and months to get this to Paul. It's going to be a dangerous trip. Maybe somebody else can do it."

It's funny how people are eager sometimes to dip into their pockets and put money in the bag, but they aren't always willing to sacrifice the time and give their lives to serving the Lord. No big deal to write a check, no big deal to put money in the offering, but "You want me to do what? You want me to take three months off work and travel where there's bad people that could beat me up and steal the money, and eat food that's very difficult to eat and go through all that rigor to take it to Paul?" This man sacrificed himself to carry this money to Paul. That's what Paul's referring to in Philippians 4, where he talks about, "...an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice," the offering was like a sacrifice given to him.

Going back to Philippians 2, we see that Paul "...longed after you all, and was full of heaviness," he had great concern. He had compassion, "For he longed after you all," at Philippi. Why? Here it is, "because that ye had heard that he had been sick." Notice verse 27, "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death," he almost died. Quickly, a couple things, here's a man of God, nothing bad said about him, beautiful godly character, Christlike, a sacrificial servant, and God allowed him to get sick and almost die. This is why this section of Philippians is jumped over, especially by the health and wealth and prosperity people. It's like, "Wait a minute, wait a minute! There's a guy in the Bible that got sick and almost died, and he's with Paul the Apostle? Why didn't he pray for him that God would heal him?" No doubt, he did; but God didn't heal him quite yet. No doubt he did pray for him, but God chose to allow him to get sick.

Even good, godly, righteous people get sick and sometimes die. God bless you. Have a great night. I just thought I'd share that with you. To deny that is to deny reality. There's nowhere we're promised that we will never get germs. There's nowhere promised that our bodies will stay perfectly healthy until we dismiss our spirit and go to Heaven or raptured by the Lord. Paul says, "He was sick," and then said, if I could free paraphrase it, "The dude almost died!" That's why he said, "...lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." He says, "I'm in prison. It's bad enough I'm in jail, you sent this guy to help me, and then he gets sick and almost croaks on me. Thank you very much."

Paul says, "What happened was," this is where it even gets more interesting, "Epaphroditus found out that you in Philippi found out that he was sick, and he found out that you were worrying about him being sick, so he started worrying about you worrying about him being sick." Here's Paul with chains on his wrists, needs all the help and encouragement he can get, finally Epaphroditus shows up, "Oh! Praise the Lord! Good to see you," and he starts throwing up all over the place. "Oh, bummer!" Then word comes, "Hey, they found out you're sick. They're really worried about you." "Oh no! I'm worried about them worrying about me, so I'm worrying about them worrying about me!" They're worrying about each other, and Paul is just

like, "Hey, I'm just going to send you back." Paul could've said, "No. I want you to stay here and help me. I need some encouragement. I need somebody to serve with me. But Paul was thinking of Epaphroditus and of the believers in Philippi, so he said, "I'm going to send him back to you. When he comes back to you, I want you to hold him in reputation," I want you to honor him. We get our word "honorarium" from that. "I want you to publicly recognize him. He wasn't a failure. He didn't give up. I want you to recognize him when he comes back."

Verse 28, "I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful," so Paul says, "I'm sending him back." Evidently, God did heal him and Paul sent him back, and then his reunion, verse 28, with the believers back in Philippi. Notice what Paul says in his commendation of him, verse 29, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation," or give him honor, show him appreciation.

The danger would be that the believers in Philippi, when Epaphroditus came back, would say, "Why did you come back? We sent you to help Paul. You flaked out. You didn't fulfill your mission," and would think that he had failed. Paul gives them this letter to take back to explain what happened to him and why he sent him and all that was going on. He said, "No, hold him, "...in reputation."

In closing, notice verse 30. I love this. Why should they honor Epaphroditus? Why should they show appreciation for this man? "Because for the work of Christ," not for selfish reasons, not for having a good time doing what he wanted to do, but "...for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death," he almost died. Read it in a modern translation. It's hard to read in a modern translation and not start to cry, "... for the work of Christ he almost died." One modern translation has, "He risked his life," one has, "He gambled with his life."

Some Christians are so afraid of protecting their lives that they never break out of their comfort zone and serve the Lord. What kind of a life is that? Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." We want to play it safe. We don't want anyone to rock the boat. We don't want to get hurt. We don't want to get sick. We don't want to die, so we play it safe. I think it's wise to use wisdom. I think it's wise to calculate the risks involved, but when God calls you, and you give your life to follow Jesus Christ, it's "I'll go where You want me to go; I'll do what You want me to do; I'll say what You want me to say; I'll be what You want me to be." You follow Him. You take up your cross and you follow Him. You don't give Him stipulations and terms.

This is the reason why I want to shake this man's hand when I get to Heaven, "Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death," he almost died, "to supply your lack of service toward me." They couldn't minister to Paul, he gave of himself. I imagine they took the offering, set it on the altar and said, "Well, here's the money. Paul's in Rome. How are we going to get it there?" I imagine Epaphroditus said, "I'll take it. I feel the Lord's calling me to take it."

Now, if you're going to give somebody a bag of money and it's going to take him months to get there, you better make sure you know who it is, right? because you want the money to show

up. It speaks of the confidence that the believers in Philippi had about Epaphroditus to be able to entrust him with the money to carry it to Paul and his Christ-like character. So, "...for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death," he almost died, and he did it, "...to supply your lack of service toward me." This is fulfilled going back to Philippians 2:3, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better," or more important, "than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Amen? Let's pray.