



Sermon – August 9, 2020  
Wes Wilkinson

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Philippians 2:19 - 27*

*Romans 12:9 - 13*

What a joy, church family, it is to be with you this morning. I am grateful for Phillip allowing me to step in and open the word with you this morning. And as we come to the word this morning, I want to throw out a question to you. And the question's a simple question; and it's this. What does it mean to be brothers and sisters in Christ? And what I mean by that question is not what would be the dictionary definition explaining what it means to be a brother and sister in Christ. Really what I mean is, what is the nature of that relationship? What does that relationship look like lived out on a day to day basis? And I am convinced the text we're going to look at this morning answers this question. So if you've got your Bibles, I want you to go to the book of Philippians to chapter 2, verse 19. Philippians chapter 2, verse 19. And as you turn there, let me just remind us of a little bit of context. Paul is writing the church in Philippi. This was the first church in what is modern day Europe. This is the church when he first went into Europe at the leadership of the Holy Spirit that he comes to. This is the church that has not just received Him and not just received the gospel, but a church that has taken up the mantle and partners with him. They are laborers in Christ and he goes on to speak of this throughout the letter. And Paul is writing from prison. He's in Rome under house arrest chained daily to a Roman soldier. And the church has sent word to him and sent someone to bring him gifts and to encourage him. And he is writing back. Now as we come to this passage, let me just tell you, this is what I believe to be the most forgotten passage in the book of Philippians. There's no pictures at the Christian bookstore with any of these verses on it like there are from all the other sections of Philippians. And I fear that that forgetfulness bleeds into why maybe we don't understand what does it mean to be a brother and sister in Christ. Here we go. Verse 19, chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup>But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. <sup>20</sup>For I have no one else of kindred spirit, of like soul, who will be genuinely, truly, not fake, but genuinely be concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup>For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. <sup>22</sup>But you know of Timothy's proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. <sup>23</sup>In light of this, I hope to send him immediately, as soon

as I see how things go with me, <sup>24</sup>and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

Here's what Paul says. He says, I hope in the Lord. I have this expectation and this hope that I surrendered to the sovereignty of God. That I would be able to send Timothy to you. The reason I'm sending Timothy to you is so that that I may be encouraged. It's two words put together that literally mean that my soul may be filled with life. To hear how you are doing. How you are walking in Christ. And he says, and the reason I'm sending Timothy and we can't miss this, church family, he says, the reason I'm sending Timothy is because I don't have anyone else who is of like soul, who is of like mindset, who is of like heart. I don't have anyone else who when I send them to you is going to be truly, genuinely, concerned for your welfare. And that welfare is the interest of Christ in your life and through your life. I know of no one. Now obviously Paul is likely not making a universal statement that there is not another human being on planet earth at that time that would have any genuine concern. But we can't miss the magnitude. Here is Paul, there's the church in Rome, there's others around him. And when he says, "When I look around me to send someone to you, there's only one who truly is not driven by an ounce of self-focus or an ounces of self-glory. Who truly when I send Timothy to you, his focus will be the interest of Christ among you." The ministry and the work of Christ among you and I'm sending him. You know him. He's been tested. That word prove, he's proven, he's been tested, he's faced trials, he's faced sorrow, he has been shaped and refined and he's been proven because he has served, he has taken on. That word literally, he has taken on the duties, the work, of a servant or slave. It reflects back to earlier in chapter 2 when we see Jesus who took on the form of a slave, of a servant. You see this humility in Timothy that drives him forward, that has caused him to labor in the furtherance of the gospel and disciple-making and the proclamation of the gospel. And seeing people receive the gospel message and seeing the gospel message played out in people's lives. Paul says, this Timothy I am expecting to send him to you soon. But obviously this letter is arriving at the church and it's not Timothy who brings it; it's someone else. So here's what Paul says, verse 25.

<sup>25</sup>But I thought it necessary, I thought it of vital importance, it had to happen now, to send you Epaphroditus my brother

Notice the intimacy of the family connection. My fellow worker. This a man who labors in ministry alongside Paul. It's not just someone who receives from Paul, but someone who is passionate in making disciples and engaging in the gospel ministry. And he's not just a coworker, but a fellow soldier. Epaphroditus is a man who has suffered for the sake of that ministry. A man who has, who has suffered alongside Paul who between he and Paul, there is a relationship of a special kind of love and trust that only comes from soldiers in the battlefield of eternity. He said, "He was your messenger. He is the one that you sent out, you sent out, you sent him out to me to bring a message and a minister to my need. A minister, a minister, one who is performing a sacred duty. And what was that sacred work that Epaphroditus was doing? He came as the messenger of the Philippian church who could not be with Paul. He came bringing a financial gift. He came bringing encouragement. He came to take care of Paul's needs as Paul was there under house arrest in prison chained to a soldier. But this is why he's sending Epaphroditus back. Look at 26.

<sup>26</sup>Because Epaphroditus was longing, longing for you and he was distressed because you heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup>For indeed he was sick to the point of death. Oh, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

Here's the reality. Somewhere along the way, Epaphroditus, whether it's on the journey to Rome, whether it's while he's in Rome, Epaphroditus comes down with an illness and he is so sick that he is at the point of dying. And it doesn't say how God acted mercifully. Was it a divine healing? Was it through medicine? We don't know. But God intervened in an act of mercy and spared Epaphroditus' life. But Epaphroditus is aware this word has made it back to the church in Philippi. They are concerned. And it says that Epaphroditus, it says he is longing for you. He desires you strongly. It's a passionate term that we see used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the passion, the longing of God who is jealous for His people to live out His holiness. It's the same term used in 1 Peter 2 when it describes that we as believers should long like infants for the pure milk of the word. It's the same word used in 2 Corinthians 4 to describe the longing we should have for heaven and for the ending of our brokenness here. It's the same word used throughout the New Testament primarily to describe the kind of longing and passionate relationship and the strong desire and affection that brothers and sisters in the body have for each other. But he's not just in this deep longing. It says, he was distressed. He was extreme mental or spiritual anguish. He is so longing for his church family and to bring encouragement, to go back and to relieve their anguish that it is causing frequent interruptions. That word for distressed is only used three times in all of the Bible. This is one. The other two describe the anguish of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; the night before He went to the cross. Epaphroditus has this deep longing to go back to the Philippian church to serve them, to serve with them. And so Paul says, "Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly, with great haste, so that when you see him again, you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. So receive him then in the Lord with all joy and hold, reckon, view such men like him worthy of great honor. Hold them in high regard. Why? Because he came close to death for the work of Christ risking, putting his life willfully in danger to complete what was deficient in your service to me." And by deficient he doesn't mean that they were lacking, but they could not be there. Epaphroditus went on their behalf to do what they could not do. The Philippian church couldn't be in Rome with Paul. But they could send Epaphroditus and as he's sending him back, Paul says, "You receive him in the, with all joy in the Lord and you honor him."

Now as you walk through this text, you can understand why maybe it's easily overlooked. It seems like Paul's just kind of rattling off some random plans, he wants to send Timothy, he's sending Epaphroditus. And really when you come down to it, what he's telling the church to do is to receive and to honor such men. Such men who carry out and live out the character of Christ who engage faithfully in the work of Christ in and amongst the body. This is the central command that he lays out to the church to honor. And the question comes to you and I, who do we honor? Church family, who do we honor? Who do we hold in high regard? When we look at fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, who are the ones we look at when we say, "Wow! That person is worthy of great honor." Is it the person who has great charisma? Who leads the largest ministry or has the biggest life group or is it the person who most reflects Christ who could be the leader of the largest ministry but could also be that pastor pastoring a church in small town Oregon that's no more than 50 people laboring day in and day out by himself for the good of that community. It could be someone like I think of growing up in this church, someone like Carolyn

Browning who taught fourth grade Sunday school for forty-some-off years who impressed upon my life. Is she the name that anybody at the Passion conference will know? No. But was she faithful to labor and to serve? Was she faithful for the work of Christ in my life and so many others? Absolutely, yes. So how do we live out the command to honor? Let me just put it very simply. If someone has been used by God to touch your life or my life, they shouldn't have to wait until their funeral to find out how God used them. In fact, if there is someone whom God has used or someones most likely, who has been faithful, who has been faithful for the work of Christ in your life and my life, if they do not know how then one great way of application today is today should be the day they find out. Whether through the words of a phone call, through the words of a note. Because we are called to honor such men. But is this all that Paul has in mind? And I am convinced studying this text, this is but the tip of the iceberg. Because Paul knows who we honor and why we honor them reveals our values. Because what Paul has done throughout the book of Philippians, is he has said, he has called them to labor, to strive, side by side, only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. He has called them earlier in chapter 2 to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. He has laid out the example of Christ and the humility of Christ in leaving heaven and taking on flesh and coming to die. Yes, even death on a cross that you and I deserve. And what he does here in saying, I'm going to send Timothy and Epaphroditus, what he does in putting up their character is he shows you and I, just like the Philippian church, the example of everything he has just commanded in the book of Philippians lived out. He shows us the example of men who are faithful and humble to carry out the character of Christ to engage in the work of Christ. Did you catch that at the end? We hold him in high regard because he came close to death for the work of Christ.

Church family, what does it mean to be a brother and sister in Christ? It means God has given us a work, a ministry, amongst each other. What does this look like? Look with me back at the text. If we're going to engage in the work of Christ, it means that we are genuinely concerned for the welfare of the body. Did you see that with Timothy? I've known who would be genuinely concerned, who truly would be concerned. Whose concern for you is honest and real. There's a video, very much satirical, from a Christian ministry and it's translating modern Christian phrases. And they give a phrase you often hear in church and then what's really meant by it. Now many of these I find humorous because I've heard 95% of them used in the way that they say. But one of them is, "I'm here for you, brother." And the translation is, "I want to seem supportive, but I really hope you don't reach out, brother." If we're honest, to be engaged in the work of Christ means I can't just seem supportive, I must be supportive. I can't just seem concerned; I must be concerned. It is a genuine concern. We do this when we say, "Oh man, I will totally pray for you." And then there is never a word uttered between us and the Father. But it's not just a genuine concern if we engage in the work of Christ. Engaging in the work of Christ amongst the body means we are about the interests of Jesus. He says, "He's the only one I can send to you because they seek their own interests, not the interests of Jesus." The interest of Jesus, church family, are about Him. They're about His glory. They're about His glory being known in and through other people's lives. They are not about us. They are not about our glory. They are not about our pleasure. They're not about the scope and size of how God would or wouldn't use us. They're about Jesus. And we say, "Well, we get that, but let me just throw this example that sticks out commonly." I've been many times with students and we do a mission trip recap and we'll bring a student on the stage. And I've seen this with adults, not just students. And we'll say, "Well ultimately after sharing about your mission trip, why would you tell

someone else to go?” And how many times have I heard the number one reason you should go is because God will change your life. Now listen. There is nothing bad about God changing your life on a mission trip. But that’s not the number one reason to go. The number one reason to go is because there is a lost world loved by a good and great God who needs to hear the message of the gospel. And we as His followers, as His children He has commissioned, that’s the reason to go. But it’s very easy to take even things of God and turn them for our own interests. It’s very easy when we minister to someone else and we’re listening to them walk through a hard time, how easy is it to counsel them away from that hard time. When who knows if that hard time is the very thing that God is using to prune them, to shape them, to mold them. See when we minister to people, we must be extremely sensitive to the Lord and not just about either our own interests or what will make the other person feel better, but about what Christ is doing. Understand that if we are about to engage in the work of God, we must do so for His interests. Timothy and Epaphroditus did not care for each other, for the church, for Paul, they did not care because they would receive glory out of it. There was no glory in their day for being associated with Christ and Paul. There was no Christian subculture or bubble in which they could get a book deal or speak at a large conference. There was no social media presence where they could be a Christian influencer. Rather they were men transformed by the Christ who humbled Himself taking on the form of a servant and submitted Himself to the point of death. Yes, even death on a cross. The Christ who was risen. The Christ who was exalted. The Christ who is seated right now at the right hand of God. That is why they labored in the work of Christ. Laboring in the work of Christ though doesn’t just mean having a genuine concern for the interest of Christ amongst the body. But notice it means having a love, a love for the body, a passionate love for the body. Did you see those words of Epaphroditus? He longed, he is distressed. There should be a passionate longing between brothers and sisters in Christ for each other. A longing that is built by the love of Christ. The love of Christ which shed His own blood. Let me ask you this question. When was the last time you would describe yourself as anxiously concerned, as distressed, because you were so wrapped up in wondering what the needs of the others in this body at Central are. When’s the last time that’s what woke you up in the middle of the night was thinking about that other person? Are they OK? How are they doing? What is there? When is the last time that was the level of longing and distress in our hearts for each other? There is a sacred love between the body. And that sacred love leads to a sacred ministry because that love, that longing, that is there you see it, you see it in Timothy, you see it in Epaphroditus and it leads Epaphroditus to minister. To perform a sacred duty. We see his ministry. We see his ministry is personal. It’s personal. He goes to Paul. There is personal interaction. Church family, you and I cannot lovingly minister out of the work of Christ. We can’t meet needs that we aren’t seeking to know. And vice versa needs that aren’t known, can’t be met. We need to understand, church family, there are some needs in others’ lives that are intended to be met by Christ’s work through us. And this kind of ministry is intentional and persistent. There is no excuse in our day and age to not be aware of what is going on in this body. The church in Philippi was 700 to 1200 miles away depending on which route you took from Rome. If you took the shortest possible route and everything went smoothly, it would take you six weeks to make the journey. If things did not go smoothly, it could take you up to six months. But that did not stop that church from knowing, “Got to know how Paul is. We’ve got to send someone to care for him.” And that didn’t stop them. The one they sent to care for him going, “I’ve got to get back.” Such ministry is intentional and persistent. Such ministry is ultimately encouraging. If you catch that in this text, Paul starts off, “I’m going to send Timothy so that I may be encouraged.” You look through as Epaphroditus ministers to his needs. You

see in this passage Timothy and Epaphroditus lifted up as examples. Yes, they were disciple makers. Yes, they shared the gospel. And this isn't pitting encouragements versus that, versus being a passionate witness for the gospel. It's both. But see here that they are being pitted as men who love the body, who are passionate about building up and encouraging the body; a half a chapter of the word of God. The eternal revelation of God to you and I is devoted to praising a man whose main function was to encourage Paul. Encouragement is not something that God takes lightly. Who knows how many more years of ministry did God use Epaphroditus to breathe into the soul of Paul. Who knows how many other letters of Scripture were written after this. And it was at the encouragement in the ministry of Epaphroditus that God, that God breathed a new strength into Paul. This is why God said, "Don't neglect the gathering of yourselves but consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds encouraging each other all the more." Romans 12 puts it this way.

<sup>9</sup>Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup>not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup>rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup>contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

Often when I hear people talk about spiritual gifts, they say, "Oh, I've got the spiritual gift of encouragement." That's the majority gift that I hear. And this is not a shot at anybody, don't think it that way. But I often ask this question. If so many in our church are gifted with the gift of encouragement, why are our churches so discouraged? If so many in the church are gifted with encouragement, why do so many pastors leave the ministry out of discouragement from the attacks of those in their church? Church family, is it possible that we don't value the ministry of encouragement as the work of Christ? And so it's not as important to us as it is to the heart of God. Let me just ask this. Who has God put on your heart and mind recently that you've not reached out to? If God put them on our heart and mind, there's a reason they're on our heart and mind. And maybe just to simply reach out and say, "Hey! You're on my heart. How can I pray for you?" "Hey! You're on my heart. What's going on in life?" And just to sit and listen. That may be all that is needed. It may be more. There may be words that God places on our heart. But will we be faithful? Because if we engage in the work of Christ, genuinely concerned for others, for the interest of Christ in their life, longing with the sacred passionate love for the body that leads to a ministry in the body, a ministry of encouragement. Then we need to understand that what this text makes clear is it will demand laying down our lives.

Three times Epaphroditus nearly died. Epaphroditus came near to death. The sickness almost took him. The repetition, laboring for the work of Christ, the ministry of Christ amongst us as a body, it will cost us time. It will cost us energy. Sometimes we'll have to pour out when we're exhausted. It will cost us comfort. Sometimes we'll have to step out of a comfort zone because the person that God laid on our heart, we may not know that really well. It may cost us convenience. It's going to demand we alter our course and our schedule. It may demand money, it may cost us rest, and it could even, in ministry to one another, cost us life. You see, Philippi was motivated by love to send Epaphroditus to Paul. Perhaps the lack of encouragement on our part is driven by our lack of love, if we're honest. And perhaps our lack of love is simply driven by our over infatuation and absorption with our own selves and our own lives. Perhaps the reason the work of Christ and the encouragement of the body is truly as low is because we are

really self-focused. We live in a world of self-focus. We're not sensitive enough to the Spirit to hear His prompting. We're too busy in our lives to follow through in His leading. And we're too infatuated with looking for others to fill us rather than going, "God whom have You called me to pour out into today?" See, church family, God has called us to a ministry, a work of Christ, amongst each other. There's a book called the Insanity of God by missionary, Nik Ripken. And he and his wife as missionaries, they lost their son on the mission field to a sickness. And they came home in grief and really struggling with walking through and, "God where were you?" And "What happened?" And he set out on a journey to go to different parts of the world where the church had faced hostile persecution and to learn from those believers. And this journey took him to Russia where he found this story.

There was a pastor who was sent to prison. His wife and small children were sent to live in a dilapidated cabin out in Siberia. They were sent there to live, more adequately, to die. And during the winter they broke their last piece of bread and they drank the last of their tea. They had no more food. And so the mother put the children to bed hungry asking, "When are we going to get more food, Mama? We're hungry. Do you think Papa even knows where we are?" And all the mother could do was simply say, "Our heavenly Father knows. We'll pray and He will provide." Eighteen and a half miles away in a small village, there was a deacon. In the middle of the night God woke him up and the Holy Spirit said, "Get out of bed. Harness your horse. Hitch the horse to the sled. Load up all the extra vegetables the church has harvested, the meat, the other food that the congregation has collected, and take it to the pastor's family living outside the village. They are hungry." The deacon fought back and said, "But Lord, I can't do that. It's below zero outside. My horse might freeze and I might freeze." The Holy Spirit said, "You must go. The pastor's family is in trouble." But the deacon persisted and he said, "Lord, You've got to know there are wolves everywhere. They could eat my horse and if they do, they'll eat me and I'll never make it back." And that's when the Holy Spirit responded, "You don't have to come back. You just have to go." Church family, whom is God calling us in this body to go to be genuinely concerned for the interest of Christ? Because of a deep sacred love that drives us to a ministry of encouragement and building up even if it means we don't come back.

Pray with me.

Jesus, Your gospel is a going gospel. You came from heaven. Father, You sent Your Son. Jesus, You lived the life we couldn't. You died the death we rightfully deserve. You raised, You walked out of that grave resurrected. You sit at the right hand of the Father, and You are returning. Your gospel is forward moving. It is a going, sending, gospel and You call us to go out and You call us to go out to the ends of the world. But You also say that the world will know we are Yours by the way we love each other. So, Lord, I realize this is a very different text. It's not common, but oh Lord, that we at Central would be Timothies and Epaphroditus'. That we at Central would be about Your work and Your interest in and amongst each other. Father lay names of people on our heart that You raised us up to go care for. Find us faithful. It's in Your name I pray, Jesus. Amen.