

p 51 WEEK 7: UPDATES, TRAVEL PLANS, AND MODELS TO FOLLOW

Philippians 2:19–30

The Place of the Passage

Personal updates and practical matters are no small part of Paul's letter to the Philippians. In many ways, the letter begins (1:12–18) and ends (4:1–19) on these notes. His update on Timothy and Epaphroditus in the middle (2:19–30) is the longest of these sections. Having called the Philippian church to unity with Christlike selflessness, servanthood, and sacrifice (1:27–2:11), and having commanded them to work out their salvation (2:12–18), Paul now gives necessary updates on two model servants who exemplify the very ideals he has encouraged in 1:27–2:18.

p 52 The Big Picture

Knowing their concern for the welfare of their own Epaphroditus, Paul notifies the Philippians of his plans to send back this now-healthy fellow minister and the equally caring Timothy as soon as possible.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through Philippians 2:19–30, which will be the focus of this week's study. Following this, review the questions below concerning this section of the book of Philippians and write your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2284 or visit www.esvbible.org.)

In this passage Paul gives practical updates on the health and the comings and goings of messengers. Such "travelogues" occur in other letters by Paul. Most often they occur at the end of a letter, such as in 2 Timothy 4:9–21. In Philippians, however, this travelogue is in the middle of the body of the letter. Why might this be? What might it signify about 2:19–30?

Read Philippians 4:1–18 with 2:19–30 in mind. Using these passages, and what you know of Paul's situation from earlier in our study, piece together the narrative that is in the background of this letter. In other words, certain events have happened or will happen; what are they? (You should be able to list a half dozen or so.)

p 53 Why might Paul have felt the need to keep Timothy with him for the time being (vv. 19–23)? Why might Paul have felt the need to explain to the Philippian church his plans for Timothy?

The apostle Paul had many mission partners and emissaries. In one sense, Timothy was just one of many. But, in another sense, passages like 1 Corinthians 4:16–17 suggest that Timothy was unique. Looking at 1 Corinthians 4:16–17 and Philippians 2:19–26, what words does Paul use to commend Timothy? What words highlight the uniqueness of his relationship to Paul?

Timothy was “genuinely concerned for” the Philippians’ “welfare” (v. 20), not like others, who “seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (v. 21). These are parallel but contrasting statements. What is the connection between the Philippians’ “welfare” and the “interests ... of Jesus Christ”? (Hint: the same parallel is found in Matt. 25:31–46.)

p 54 Note the language that Paul uses to describe Timothy and Epaphroditus in 2:19–30. Then reread 2:1–18. What themes and words are in both sections? Is Paul merely acknowledging and commending Timothy and Epaphroditus in verses 19–30, or is he also implying something more?

In verse 25 Paul describes Epaphroditus in five different ways. List them, and then spell each out in your own words.

Epaphroditus’s work and worth are spoken of in lofty terms (vv. 25, 29–30). But what was the “work” and “service” that Paul was referring to in verse 30? Are you surprised that such work garners Paul’s lofty praise? Why or why not?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

p 55 Gospel Glimpses

SEEING CHRIST IN OTHERS. While this section of the letter has its own purposes of updating the Philippians on practical matters, Timothy and Epaphroditus also serve as real-life examples of the Christlike attitude and actions that Paul calls the Philippians to in 2:1–8. Timothy exemplifies concern and selflessness (vv. 20–21). Both Timothy and Epaphroditus have “served” Paul in his need (vv. 22, 25). Epaphroditus is concerned for the Philippians; even selflessly concerned for their concern for him (v. 26). A supreme mark of Christlikeness, he was willing to lay down his life for the Philippians, for Paul, and for the gospel mission (v. 30). Paul never explicitly says that the Philippians should follow the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus—he doesn’t need to; it is clearly implied. While Christ is the perfect example (and the only saving sacrifice), God is good to give us imperfect but important examples of Christlikeness to watch and imitate. Paul will make this point more explicitly later in this letter (3:17; 4:9).

Whole-Bible Connections

THE MISSION. With all of the updates and personal commendations of 2:19–30, it might be easy to forget the most basic point behind all these comings and goings: the mission. That’s why Paul is imprisoned and awaiting trial. That’s why the Philippians sent support to Paul through Epaphroditus. It was the “work of Christ” for which he was “risking his life” (v. 30). For the sake of the mission, too, Timothy must stay with Paul for the time being (likely for Paul’s defense); but he will return to Philippi as soon as possible to check up on the church (v. 19). His concern for their welfare is part of seeking the “interests ... of Jesus Christ” (v. 21). Sacrifice. Concern. Going. Serving. Risking. All for the sake of Christ and his mission. We shouldn’t read 2:19–30 without remembering the gospel-priority in which Paul exulted in 1:12–18. And we shouldn’t read 2:19–30 without remembering themes like the hope of global praise in Psalm 117 or the great commission in Matthew 28:18–20.

CARING FOR THE BODY. The Philippians’ care and concern for Paul, and Timothy and Epaphroditus’s care and concern for the Philippian believers, might bring to mind what Paul elsewhere writes about the nature of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, for instance, he explains that the church is like a human body—one entity, but different parts doing different things for the common good. Some parts are small; some functions seem insignificant; but whether large or small, visible or hidden, all parts are needed (see 1 Cor. 12:18–23). That is why “God has so composed the body” with “no division” in [p 56](#) it—so that “the members may have the same *care* for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (vv. 24–26). This picture is exemplified in the communion of mutual care shown in Philippians 2:18–30.

Theological Soundings

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY. Twice when speaking of his plans, Paul uses the phrase “in the Lord.” He hopes “in the Lord” to soon send Timothy to Philippi (v. 19); he trusts “in the Lord” that he will eventually come as well (v. 24). Is Paul just tacking on superfluous spiritual language here? Far from it! Paul is echoing what James taught regarding the sin of making plans without acknowledging that God’s sovereignty alone is decisive (James 4:13–16). James insists, “you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that’ ” (v. 15). With different language, Paul is modeling this very thing. His plans are “in the Lord”—in his hands, up to him, subject to him. As Proverbs teaches, “man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (16:9). Epaphroditus knew this as well; he was “near to death” but “*God* had mercy on him” (Phil. 2:27). Our travel plans, our living and dying, and everything else, fall under God’s providence (see Acts 17:25–28). This reality not only needs to be believed and gladly embraced by Christians, but it also needs to be regularly *verbalized*, as both Paul and James show us.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Philippians 2:19–30 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the

(1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

p 57 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Philippians 2:19–30

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Philippians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.