

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Philippians - The Christian Life: The Lowly Mind - Philippians 2:12-30

The pattern and the mould

The process of die casting is a very ancient one. A material, such as glass or metal, is poured into a mould while it is still fluid. The material takes the shape of the mould as it solidifies. By this process, men for years have been able to reproduce items from a pattern. It is very helpful to bear this process in mind as we consider Philippians 2:12-30.

In the light of the example above we could say that the pattern is the Lord Jesus. The mould is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the final product is a representation of the pattern. We must remember that one of the greatest works of the Holy Spirit is to reproduce in us the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the pattern for everything in us today.

Last week we considered Philippians 2:1-11 where we read the exhortation, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:5). Then we thought about the beautiful way the Lord Jesus became a servant and being found as a man in this world, humbled Himself, "and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). This is not only an exhortation to be humble, but is really a challenge to become obedient to the will of God.

In Philippians 2:9 we have God's answer to that down stooping grace of the Lord Jesus, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him". Where we begin reading today, we have another "wherefore". "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, 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" (Philippians 2:12).

Working out your salvation

The first "wherefore" was God's response to the grace of the Lord Jesus. The second is what should be our response to that grace. We must notice that it does not say, "work for your own salvation". Nowhere in the Bible is there ever a thought that we can do that. But we should work out in our lives what God has worked into us. There is a great difference between working for, and working out. The work for us was completed by the Lord Jesus on the cross. When we believed, the Holy Spirit sealed that work in us, and it is done once and forever. But now, we should work out that salvation so that it can be seen in our lives. Even this is the result of God working in us. Paul speaks of God beginning a good work in us in Philippians 1:6. That work will be completed when we are fashioned like unto His glorious body, as Philippians 3:21 tells us. In between these two workings is what we have to do now, work it out in our lives.

Lights in this crooked and perverse world

A very commendable feature of the Philippians is mentioned here. They had very gladly responded to the ministry that Paul had given them when he was with them (Philippians 2:12-13). Now he had been taken away and was far off in prison, would they go on in the same way? How often we respond well when we are watched over by a tutor, but when we are left on our own it is a different matter altogether. We become slack in our work. It was not so at Philippi; they carried on in the same way.

Because they did this Paul calls them lights in this crooked and perverse world (Philippians 2:15). The true character of sons of God was seen in them; blameless and harmless, there was nothing to rebuke. Thus too we shall be suitable witnesses here, able to hold forth the word of life to a world that is morally dead. As Paul thought of this potential in the Philippians, he could rejoice that his work amongst them was not in vain (Philippians 2:16).

So now we consider three men who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, worked out the life of Jesus in themselves. The working of God, as the mould in our example, fixed their eyes on the pattern of the Lord Jesus and formed in them the character of the Lord Jesus. These men are:

- Paul the writer of this letter,

- His young son in the faith, Timothy, and lastly,
- Epaphroditus, who had brought a gift from the Philippians to Paul and was returning to them with this letter.

Example 1 - Paul

Paul does not say much about himself. This is perfectly in keeping with a true servant. We have already noticed that he does not write this letter as an Apostle, but rather as a servant, or as it should read a bond slave (Philippians 1:1). Remember the pattern, the One who became the perfect servant and came to do the will of God. Here Paul speaks of himself as a slave, one whose only job was to obey his master. But what he does say about himself is very precious. Philippians 2:17 says, "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all". In his last letter to Timothy he also says, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6). We are not left in any doubt as to what he was speaking about. It was, of course, his own martyrdom. He sees this terrible end to his life as being an offering to God. It was truly a sacrifice for Paul himself, but it was really an offering to God. This reminds us of the One who offered Himself without spot to God as a sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:14).

The word "offered" here, Philippians 2:17, could read "poured out". It is a reference to the drink offerings which were poured upon the sacrifices in the Old Testament (Exodus 29, Leviticus 23, Numbers 6). They spoke of something that was added to the offering, an excess, which added to the pleasure of God in the sacrifice. If we bear this in mind, we see something very beautiful in what Paul says. He refers to the service and faith of the Philippians as an on-going sacrifice, just like the burnt offering in the camp of Israel which was offered every morning and evening, and the fire of those offerings was never to go out (Numbers 6:9-13). So there was in the lives of the Philippians a continual service going on that was entirely for God, but resulting in blessing for men. Again think about the pattern of our illustration, the Lord Jesus Himself. He said, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). That was the perfect answer to the burnt offering of old, seen in the life and death of Jesus. But the Holy Spirit was working out the same thing in the Philippians. Paul recognised that there was something there which was pleasing to God, a service that was acceptable to Him. All that he wanted was to be poured out as a drink offering on their sacrifice.

What a lovely Christ-like character this was! Not thinking or speaking much about himself, but speaking of what others were doing and just content to do the will of God, even though it would mean his dying as a martyr. This would just be an added sweetness to the service and faith of the Philippians.

Another feature that we cannot miss in this letter is the deep bond of love that existed between Paul and the Philippian believers. Their joy of service was mutual - he rejoicing over what they were doing and they rejoicing when they thought of this devoted servant who had so laboured amongst them (Philippians 2:18). Yes, he had probably been the means of bringing them to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Whilst he was now parted from them and in prison he was still thinking of them, praying and exhorting them to go on with the Lord.

Example 2- Timothy

Because of this Paul wanted to know how they were getting on. So despite the fact that he hoped to come and see them himself when he knew how things would go for himself, he sends Timothy to see them. It is in this way that the second of our three men comes to light in this chapter. We have to remember that even when Paul was still alive many had already waxed cold in their affection for Christ. Philippians 2:21 makes this clear, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's". This short statement is very practical and is perfectly in keeping with our subject. The early verses of this chapter make it so plain that the Lord Jesus did not seek His own. His one desire was to do the will of His Father (John 4:34). How often we are reminded of His words in the garden of Gethsemane, where the cost of doing His Father's will was so fully brought before Him. "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine be done" (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

Probably the greatest hindrance to spiritual growth is our own will, doing what we want to. We need to keep our eyes constantly on our pattern, the Lord Jesus, so we shall learn that doing the will of God and walking in a way that pleases Him is the greatest thing in our lives. Both with Timothy and Epaphroditus we will see this matter of my will or His coming out. This puts it very simply. When I am faced with a decision, do I first think of my will, or does Christ come first? Likewise, it has been said about owning Jesus as Lord, "if He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all".

Timothy stands out against this dark background. Paul says in Philippians 2:20, "For I have no man like minded, who will naturally care for your state". His life previously had proved this. So Paul had confidence in him and this was known to the Philippians. "But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel" (Philippians 2:22).

Timothy is a good example of one who grows up spiritually. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul writes to him, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in

Christ Jesus". He had the best start in life in as much that as a child, he was taught the Scriptures. We can do nothing better for our own children than to teach them the word of God. But he did not remain a child. He grew and in 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul writes to him, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers". Even while he was still a young man, he was effective in his witness because of love and faith and purity, so he was not to be despised even though he was still young. Again, in that same letter, in 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul says, "But thou, O man of God..." Timothy is the only person so spoken of in the New Testament.

But there are at least two other things that we need to consider about Timothy. He was real, or genuine. There was nothing ostentatious or just outward show with him. Paul writes of his "unfeigned faith" in 2 Timothy 1:5. Faith in scripture is always Godward. Timothy was real in his relationship with God. But then he was genuine in his love and care for the saints (2 Timothy 1:5). Paul speaks of his natural care for the Philippians. So he was real towards God, and real towards his fellow believers. These two things stand together. Unless our relationship with God is right, then we will always have difficulty in getting on with our fellow Christians.

So we see how much Timothy had taken on the character of Christ. He was prepared to carry out the will of God, whatever it may involve, and to do so in a true spirit of sacrificial love that was seen perfectly in the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the young man that Paul was sending to the Philippians.

Example 3- Epaphroditus

Next we come to Epaphroditus, about whom Paul had nothing but good to say. It would seem as though he came from Philippi (Philippians 2:25). Perhaps he could even have been the jailer who was such a wonderful part of the beginning of Paul's work there (see Acts 16:25-44), who knows? It is evident that he was devoted to Christ. This was seen in his service towards the Philippians and his ardent love to Paul. The Philippians, though being very poor, had gathered together a gift for Paul. But how were they going to get it to him? He was in prison at Rome, which was well over 500 miles away by the direct route crossing the Adriatic Sea. Epaphroditus was the one ready to offer himself to do this dangerous task. His journey, if he did not go across the Adriatic Sea would have been in excess of 1,000 miles. To carry money such a distance in those days would have been dangerous. Indeed it would appear that the journey had been a very bad one and had nearly cost Epaphroditus his life (Philippians 2:26-27).

Let's just read the verses about him. "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. 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. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation; because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me" (Philippians 2:25-30).

Notice how dear he was to Paul. Paul calls him "my brother". That word never left Paul's memory. He first heard it from the lips of Ananias the man who was used to give him back his sight in Acts 9:17, and gave Paul to understand that in coming to Christ he had entered upon a completely new relationship. He here speaks of Epaphroditus in this way. But he was also his companion in labour (Philippians 2:25). It would not have been easy to seek out Paul in a Roman prison. It may have involved him in suspicion and trouble from the Roman authorities. But nonetheless he had found Paul, and so Paul then calls him a fellow soldier (Philippians 2:25). He was in the same warfare as Paul was, fighting the same enemy and the same battle. And he was the Philippians' messenger (Philippians 2:25). How glad Paul must have been to see him. How it must have cheered his heart, not only to receive the gift that he brought, but to realise the love and devotion of Epaphroditus.

But there is more to him even than this. He again was one who did not think about himself, but was concerned with the well being of others - a truly Christ-like feature (Philippians 2:26). Somehow the Philippians had heard that he had been ill (Philippians 2:26). Epaphroditus was worried because they were concerned about him. This is really remarkable. He thought so little about himself that he did not like others to be anxious about him. That is real humility. It does not come naturally to any of us. It can only be the work of the Holy Spirit making us like the Lord Jesus, the One who humbled Himself (Philippians 2:8).

No doubt Paul would have loved to retain him, to have someone to share his thoughts with while alone in prison. Paul would not do this, because he too was worried about the anxiety of the Philippians over Epaphroditus. You see they were indeed brothers, not only through their faith in Christ, but also in their likeness to Him. So Paul sends him back again on that long journey (Philippians 2:29) but with this commendation, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation" (Philippians 2:28). Epaphroditus had a very low estimation of his own reputation. He, like his master, was prepared to lay it aside. But it was right that such a servant should be esteemed by his brethren because he had been a good example to them. But then Paul adds, "Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life" (Philippians 2:30). His obedience to the will of God had not quite cost him

his life, but he would have been prepared to give it if necessary. He had no regard for himself; he thought only of the work of Christ. So we see again how, in a wonderful way, the Spirit worked out in Epaphroditus, the pattern of Christ.

So the next time you turn in your Bible and read those well known verses about the Lord Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11 do not stop at Philippians 2:11 but read on through the rest of the chapter, Philippians 2:12-30, and see how three men, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus walked in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

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