

Philippians 4:12-30

*“Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.”
– Albert Einstein*

Matt 5:16 NKJV *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

*“Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.”
– Mark Twain*

This section of Philippians teaches us that we need to live lives that others can emulate. We should be providing an example that others would be eager to follow. More than that, we need to remember that the example that we show the world may be the only evidence they care to see regarding the reality of faith in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we owe the world a reliable example of a well-lived life.

God wants us to shine as lights in the world. Consider your life to be a visible example to others.

- I. Let your life be a light to others. 2:12-18
 - II. In setting an example to others, follow the example of Timothy. 2:19-24
 - III. In setting an example to others, follow the example of Epaphroditus. 2:25-30
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- I. Let your life be a light to others. 2:12-18
 - A. 2:12-13 These two verses go together to see Paul’s point. The idea is to progress to completion in spiritual growth and maturity. In v. 12 we see that we are to be active, not passive, in this process. But though we are active, we are not alone. In v. 13 Paul reminds us again that the entire process is the work of God and the result of His grace. “For it is God who works in you” even when we are working to do His will. *(See Believer’s Study Bible)*
 - B. 2:14-16 This is what the life that is a light to others is supposed to look like. Take special note of three words:
 - i. **Complaining and disputing** These things typified the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings.
 - ii. **Blameless** deserving no censure, free from fault or defect (Thayer)
 - iii. **Harmless** unmixed, unadulterated (Robertson)
 - iv. **Without fault** unblemished in reputation and in reality (Vincent)
 - C. 2:17-18 In both pagan and Jewish rites, sacrifices often involved pouring wine on top of the sacrifice or at the foot of the altar. This libation or “drink offering” generally completed the sacrifice. *(Victor Bible Background Commentary)*
 - D. Paul is trying to say something like this:
 - i. That the difficulties he was experiencing were in some sense for the Philippians, on their behalf. He considered it a part of his ministry, of which they were the visible fruit.

- ii. Ultimately, he was willing to lay down his life, if that was the price he was going to have to pay in order to take the gospel to the Gentiles and see to it that people like the Philippians enjoyed the full benefit of an authentic relationship with the Lord. **Repeat Matt 5:16.**

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- II. In setting an example to others, follow the example of Timothy. 2:19-24
 - A. Timothy had a Jewish mother and grandmother who taught him the Scriptures, but it appears his father did not believe. On Paul's first missionary trip to the region of Galatia, Timothy came to Christ. On Paul's return visit there, Paul brought him on as part of his team. From that point on he became Paul's apprentice – and close associate. Several things stand out about Timothy:
 - B. 2:20 **Timothy and Paul were like-minded.** Paul had confidence in Timothy. He knew that Timothy shared his values and vision for ministry. I suspect this kind of reference from Paul was not especially easy to get. In other words, Paul was not always the easiest guy to work with – but that is not intended as a criticism. Paul was simply so hard working, so sharp intellectually, and so full of determination that others just had trouble keeping up with him. Think of his various issues with John Mark, Barnabas and Peter in ministry. Then consider his run-ins with the authorities in just about every city from Jerusalem to Rome. The Bible indicates that Timothy, on the other hand, was more sensitive, even timid, and sickly by comparison. Paul and Timothy were not an automatic match. The credit goes to Timothy for making this relationship what it was.
 - C. 2:21 **Timothy cared for the churches.** Earlier in the letter Paul mentioned those who preached the gospel from selfish motives. Timothy was not one of those. His focus was on helping others grow in their faith. He was selfless. He did not seek his own interests. This is a priceless trait in ministry; it is just as valuable today as it was then.
 - D. 2:22 **Timothy's character was proven.** Thayer defines this word as “tried character, a proof, a specimen of tried worth.” Years of experience had proven to Paul that Timothy was unquestionably reliable.

Character is what a man is in the dark. – D.L. Moody

Paul could point out to the Philippian church that they knew Timothy's proven character; they had seen it for themselves.

Moreover, Timothy served with Paul **as a son with his father.** This goes back to that like-mindedness mentioned earlier. Timothy had a sense of personal loyalty to Paul that inspired Paul's more than anyone else.

- **Application:** Being a person of character.
 - Timothy was tried, tested and proven by Paul and others. Paul had no more reliable man on his team. His reputation was not based on his own advertising, but on the experience that people had of working with him and around him.
 - A few questions to ask ourselves:
 - Do those who know me the best trust me the most?
 - Do my relationships with others tend to grow deeper and more meaningful over time – or do they tend to grow shallow or more strained?
 - Do people readily recommend me for significant and difficult tasks based on their experience with me?
 - I hope we can all answer all of those questions with a yes. If so, then keep doing what you are doing, because you are proving your character as you do. If not, this may point out something we can work toward – something we can improve.

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III. In setting an example to others, follow the example of Epaphroditus. 2:25-30

- A. We don't know much about Epaphroditus. We know he was from the Philippian church. We know he brought Paul gifts of money from them. We know he was deathly ill while with Paul and that the apostle was deeply concerned about him.
- B. 2:28-29 Beyond that, Paul sent him back, but lest the Philippians should think E was wimping out, Paul reminds them that they should hold men like him in high esteem.
- C. 2:30 Paul commends Epaphroditus because of his willingness to “take chances or gamble with his life”. The phrase **not regarding his life** suggests a sort of recklessness. Lightfoot suggests it might be used of “persons who risk their lives to nurse those sick with the plague.” In one inscription found near the Black Sea, it means “to daringly expose oneself to danger.” (See also *Victor Bible Background Commentary*)
- **Application:** The most impressive aspect of Epaphroditus's life is his openness to personal sacrifice in the cause of Christ. He gave until it hurt – physically. That was what endeared him to Paul. The apostle could identify with E because they both shared this trait. They both gave everything he had for the gospel.
 - We may never be imprisoned for our faith or die as martyrs – even in history or times of persecution most believers have been able to avoid that. In that sense Paul's life may seem a bit distant from our own.
 - E's example is easier to grasp. He goes off on a mission trip to help Paul, got sick in the process and almost died. Paul doesn't commend him for a dynamic ministry, but for his willingness to put everything out there for the Lord.
 - **Illustration:** Pastor from NH who came to Poland and spent his entire trip sick in bed. “Hey E, good job, man. Thanks for coming!”
 - The Philippian church gave to Paul financially, but E put his own life on the line attempting to help Paul by his physical presence.

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Conclusions:

- **Let your life be a light to others.**
 - Remember first of all that your life is an example, whether you want it to be or not.
 - Then, make sure you are providing the best example possible for others to follow.
 - Be aware that as you “work out your own salvation ... it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (2:12-13)

- **In setting an example to others, follow the example of Timothy.**
 - Make it a point to be like-minded with other believers – and if I can say this without it being self-centered – do this especially with those who lead.
 - Let your own self-interest take a back seat to the cause of Christ.
 - Let Christ develop your character – and let that be the source of your reputation.

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”
– John Wooden

- **In setting an example to others, follow the example of Epaphroditus.**
 - How important is your own life to you?
 - Epaphroditus figured that the work of the gospel was worth everything. He was willing to risk his own life to see to it that his ministry was accomplished.
 - While we shouldn’t feel guilty if our lives seem relatively stable, now is the time to begin asking ourselves those hard questions.
 - How much is Jesus worth to me?
 - What if being a Christian begins to cost me something valuable?
 - Epaphroditus almost died to fulfill his ministry. As a result he got a great reference from the apostle Paul to add to his résumé. No doubt Jesus agreed.

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