

YOU WANNA BET?

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

CHRISTIANITY IS NOT MERELY AN INTELLECTUAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, OR THEOLOGICAL EXERCISE. IT IS MEANT TO BE LIVED OUT IN THE CONTEXT OF EVERYDAY LIFE. IT IS BETTING OUR LIVES ON THE LIFE OF JESUS.

Outline

I. **BETTING ON TIMOTHY** (VS 19-24)

Not Many Are Willing To Put Our Personal Desires Aside In Order To Serve Jesus.

- A. **LEANING ON JESUS** (19 & 23)
 - B. **COUNTING ON CHARACTER** (20-22)
 - C. **RELYING ON GOD** (24)
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II. **BETTING ON EPAPHRODITUS** (VS 25-28)

There Is Honor For Those Who Try.

- A. **HIS MISSION** (25)
 - B. **HIS MISFORTUNE** (26-27)
 - C. **HIS MISERY** (28)
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III. **BETTING IT ALL** (VS 29-30)

Are We Willing To Bet Our Lives On The Truth Of The Gospel?

- A. **SHARING THE WINNINGS** (29)
 - B. **NO GUTS NO GLORY** (30)
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IV. **EPILOGUE**

YOU WANNA BET?

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

Many scholars find the placement of this text strange. Usually the Apostle Paul reserves his future itinerary for the very end of the letter. Scholars cannot figure out why he inserts this here. But I think it fits nicely into what he has been talking about. Paul said that it is necessary for the church to maintain their unity at all costs. They must stand up to threats from outside the church and they must resolve the threats that come from inside the church.

The only way to accomplish this is to die to our self-absorbed egos. We must be humble, sacrificially loving, and sacrificially serving. We must think of others as more important than ourselves.

In order to drive the point home, Paul used Jesus as an example. Jesus let go of all His privileges in order to save us and build this family we call the *church*. Jesus came in humility. He came to love and to serve sacrificially -- sacrificially unto death.

Last week Paul stated that growing to maturity and unity in love is not a mere suggestion to be considered. It is a command to be obeyed. We would want to say "That's impossible. No one could live like that."

In today's passage, Paul's response is, "You wanna bet? I'm putting my money on Timothy and Epaphroditus." Maybe we shouldn't talk too much about betting in church, because things don't always go as planned.

I had to learn this the hard way. One year, a woman lost her husband and she was left with three kids. In order to help her out, we decided to have a raffle. All the proceeds would go to this young widow. In order to get things started in church, I called up the chairman of the deacon board.

I said, "Deacon, we're having a raffle for Widow Jones. Would you like to buy a ticket?"

The deacon looked at his wife, then looked at me and said; "I'm afraid not. Even if I won, my wife wouldn't let me keep her."

Paul is putting up two guys he is willing to bet on, Timothy and Epaphroditus. If Paul

was around today, do you think he would be willing to bet on us?

I've noticed something strange over the last few years. I'm sure it has existed for a long time, but I think I perhaps noticed it because I discovered it in my own walk with God. We often turn Christianity into an intellectual exercise. In other words, we simply look at Christianity as a task to gather, debate, or judge information. Rarely does this hotly debated information transform itself into right behavior. But here is the main idea of this morning's text.

CHRISTIANITY IS NOT MERELY AN INTELLECTUAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, OR THEOLOGICAL EXERCISE. IT IS MEANT TO BE LIVED OUT IN THE CONTEXT OF EVERYDAY LIFE. IT IS BETTING OUR LIVES ON THE LIFE OF JESUS.

In other words, in living an authentic Christian life, we should be so out of step with the rest of the world, we should appear to be freakish. Here is the bet. If Jesus is Who He says He is, fully God and fully man, then we will be rewarded in eternity. In other words, we should be living our lives in a way that demonstrates we are betting everything on the truth that Jesus is exactly Who He says He is and that the Bible is His authoritative word. I can tell you this. If something like the popular *Davinci Code* were true, if someone could prove to me that Jesus was conceived from a human father, or someone could produce the body of Jesus, then my life would be absolutely meaningless. I have staked my whole life on the Jesus of the Bible.

I. BETTING ON TIMOTHY (VS 19-24)

Not Many Are Willing To Put Our Personal Desires Aside In Order To Serve Jesus.

In verses 19-24 Paul and Jesus are betting on Timothy. Through the example of Timothy's attitude, we learn that **NOT MANY ARE WILLING TO PUT OUR PERSONAL DESIRES ASIDE IN ORDER TO SERVE JESUS**. As I studied through this section I came to realize that, for the most part, I serve God out of convenience. I don't find a whole lot of sacrifice in my life. I really think that Paul wanted the people who heard him dictating the letter in Rome, the recipients of the letter in the church in Philippi, and you and I, to respond with indignation at first, and then with some serious introspection. In verse 19 and verse 23 we can see that Timothy and Paul understood what a life of faith in leaning on Jesus looked like.

A. LEANING ON JESUS (19 & 23)

Please look quickly at this section as a whole. You will notice that verse 19 starts out with the phrase, "*I hope in the Lord Jesus,*" verse 23 starts out with the phrase, "*I hope,*" and verse 24 starts out with, "*I am confident in the Lord.*" Paul and Timothy place their faith, their confidence, and their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. They laid it all on the line for Jesus. Paul was on trial for his life. At any time he could receive word that he would be crucified. Timothy went on many dangerous missions with Paul and on Paul's behalf. And notice this. All of Paul and Timothy's plans were contingent on God's will. They were not presumptuous about anything. Everything was done "if it be according to God's will and plan for their lives." They trusted Jesus for everything. As we put verse 19 and 23 together, we can sense that Paul wants to send Timothy to Philippi as soon as some decision is made in Paul's trial one way or the other. It also seems as if a major turning point in the trial is coming soon.

Now watch how Paul words this in verse 19. He says that he is sending Timothy so that Timothy can send news back to Paul that the church is doing fine. Let's keep this all in the context of the letter. We know that the church is facing pressure from the society around them. They are out of step with the nationalism and competing religions in Philippi. Every member of the church in Philippi must stand strong and courageous. It also appears there are divisions in the church that must be dealt with through humility, love, sacrifice, and service.

There are two things. First of all, Paul is sending Timothy into a potentially dangerous situation. Secondly, Paul is appealing to them as an old nagging mother. Here is the situation. He is saying, "Here I am in jail, suffering for bringing the gospel to you and others. I need some good news. I'm sending Timothy. Be good boys and girls. Make an old man happy by having all of your differences settled so Timothy can send me the good news to cheer me up." Talk about pulling out and effectively using the guilt card, Paul could only use this with a church like Philippi who deeply loved and respected him.

Think about how easy it is for us to blend in and fit in with non-Christians at work, at school, at play, and in social situations. Almost everyone we come in contact with in the world gets their ideas from music videos, MTV, television, radio, popular magazines and friends. We have turned Christianity into another form of entertainment or an intellectual exercise.

I have been a pastor now for over 25 years. During that time, I have heard people praise the sermons, applaud or criticize the music, and passionately debate ideas.

People have all sorts of suggestions for every area of ministry. But rarely, very rarely, very, very, rarely have I heard anyone say, "Because of what I heard God say to me in that sermon, I have to quit watching pornography, or I have to forgive this person, or I have to quit being so proud, or I need to keep my mouth shut, or I need to be more loving, kind, and gentle, or I need to really start giving my money away, ..." you get the idea.

B. COUNTING ON CHARACTER (20-22)

Here is where Paul wants to get everyone riled up. In verses 20-22 he says that he is counting on Timothy, and Timothy alone. In verses 20-21 Paul says that he and Timothy are literally soul mates. Think about if you were there when Paul said what he says next. He says, "Look you guys, everybody just looks out for their own interests. Only Timothy loves Jesus and you so much that he is the only qualified one for me to send to you."

Let's say I called Ken, the Worship Chairman, up here, and in front of the whole church I said, "You know, Ken is the only one I trust to take my place when I'm gone. All of you are too self-centered. Only Ken can do the job."

My guess is that most of you would become angry, indignant, or at the very least, confused. If I were sitting in earshot of this I would think, "What's the matter with me? Am I chopped liver or something? Who is Timothy anyway?" And then after I calmed down and did a bit of self-reflection, I would have to admit that I am self-absorbed -- perhaps too self-absorbed to go on a delicate and dangerous mission.

If you are anything like me, you may find in your self-reflection that you too are much too much selfish to be of real worth to God. I serve God in many ways, but all of them are out of convenience. Nothing I do is sacrificial. Nothing I do is selfless. I heard a speaker on the radio ask "What is the most courageous thing you have ever done?" I have never done anything courageous or great for God or anyone else. Timothy deeply loved Paul, he deeply loved God, and he deeply loved the people that Paul and God loved. As Paul's soul mate, Timothy loved the Philippians. He was willing to leave his friend and mentor behind. He was willing to step out into unknown waters because Paul and God were asking him to. Timothy was set apart from the rest by his love.

And in verse 22 we can see that he was set apart from the rest in service. Timothy became a slave together with Paul. Paul picked him up on his second missionary journey. Timothy left his home, his mother, grandmother, father and friends in order to slave with Paul in spreading the gospel message. He was jailed with Paul and never left

him. Timothy gave up everything near and dear to him in order to become Paul's right hand man for service in God's kingdom. I can't speak for you, but I haven't had to give up anything in order to serve Jesus. It has cost me nothing to become a Christian and to be a pastor. What is your faith and service for God costing you?

I'm sure that most of you are better than me, but I can say that my faith and service for God is done totally out of convenience. In my everyday life, rarely do I think that my daily bread comes from God.

C. RELYING ON GOD (24)

But in verse 24, Paul knew that relying on God was critical. The phrase, "*I am confident in the Lord*," could also mean something like, "I am relying on the Lord." Throughout this letter, Paul goes back and forth as to whether or not he will be released and able to come and see them. Whichever way we translate this, Paul's reliance and his confidence is in the Lord Jesus Christ. For Paul, putting the words, "if it be God's will," was no trite religious jargon. He lived and died by those words. Oh, I say those words, and in my best moments I believe them and act on them, but for the most part, I am focused on accomplishing my will.

As I studied through this section and indeed as I preach through it, I find myself extremely ashamed. If I were in Paul's audience as he dictated this letter out loud, I may have initially been offended that he singled out Timothy as he did, but as I honestly reflect on this, I would have to say he was right in regards to me. I have not distinguished myself in courage, in love, in service, or in sacrifice. I have not distinguished myself in any way for Christ. How about you? I hope that you are doing better than I am. But my hunch is that **NOT MANY ARE WILLING TO PUT OUR PERSONAL DESIRES ASIDE IN ORDER TO SERVE JESUS.**

II. BETTING ON EPAPHRODITUS (VS 25-28)

There Is Honor For Those Who Try.

Paul and Jesus were not only betting on Timothy, they were betting on Epaphroditus in verses 25-28. We are all so afraid of failure but in this section we learn that **THERE IS HONOR FOR THOSE WHO TRY.** I know that we always worry about how we will look. We focus on outcomes. But God looks on the heart. If we are willing to humble ourselves, love, sacrifice and serve, we will never fail.

A. HIS MISSION (25)

Verse 25 describes his mission. Epaphroditus was a native of Philippi . He volunteered to hand deliver a love-offering to Paul and to stay on to serve him in Rome . In other words, because Paul was a prisoner and unable to move about freely, Epaphroditus would be his hands and feet. He would be his servant. When the Philippians would see Epaphroditus returning so soon, especially since the trial was not yet over, they would think something was wrong. It is certain that there would be tongues wagging in the church. There would be plenty of comments as to Epaphroditus' failure. Paul is going to nip that in the bud. Paul says that it is necessary for him to send Epaphroditus back. It is not Epaphroditus' choice. It is Paul's. Paul refers to Epaphroditus as his brother. In other words, Paul enjoyed a deep intimate relationship with him. They were fellow workers and fellow soldiers. Epaphroditus displayed great courage in serving Paul and in serving Christ.

Look at the last phrase in verse 25. Paul says that Epaphroditus was the messenger they sent. He is literally described as an apostle. And his mission was to service Paul's needs. That word *service* is a very rich and exalted word. In a religious sense it means priestly service. In secular Greek it referred to a benefactor of a city who built shrines and public buildings. It referred to generous, religious, and civic service. The person would be considered a dignitary. Paul reminds the Philippians that Epaphroditus came on a difficult and dangerous mission. He could have been robbed or beaten for the money. He came to be a priestly servant to Paul. Whatever Paul needed, Epaphroditus was willing to do. And he was the apostle from Philippi . He was the church's official representative.

B. HIS MISFORTUNE (26-27)

Even when we are doing the right thing, we often face misfortune like Epaphroditus did in verses 26-27. We don't know what the illness was, but we do know this. The illness was life threatening. Epaphroditus got so ill that he was at death's door. Not only do we not know what the illness was, we don't know how he got well. It could be that he got some medicine. It could be that people prayed. It could be that Paul laid hands on him. It could have been all three. Nevertheless, his healing was not certain. They all thought he could die at any time. But what we do know is this. By whatever means, God had mercy on him and let him live.

So he was physically healed but the illness took its toll both emotionally and spiritually. Epaphroditus was concerned that the people back home would be worried about him.

After all, his mother, father, friends, perhaps wife and children would be worried sick. He was concerned about them. He may be worried that some in the church would think him a failure for getting sick.

And Paul himself was worried. Paul already had plenty to worry about. He could be found guilty and executed. All the people who visited and cared for him could be rounded up, put on trial and executed. And now he was worried about Epaphroditus dying in his arms. Perhaps Paul knew his family and friends. He didn't want to be the source of their grief as well. Oftentimes when we get physically sick, we have to struggle through emotional and spiritual damage as well.

C. HIS MISERY (28)

And verse 28 points out the misery as well. Paul would have to say good-bye to another friend. Epaphroditus would have to say good-bye to Paul, to Timothy and others he had worked together with in Rome . Even though it would relieve everybody's immediate anxiety, I'm sure Epaphroditus was still a little anxious about returning home so soon. He would have to face the church in which many would see him as a failure.

But let's keep this in perspective. Nobody else from Philippi went. They sent Epaphroditus. He went willingly. There is no shame for those who risk humiliation to serve Christ. None of them would know what it was like in prison. None of them left family and friends behind to go and serve God. Remember this; **THERE IS HONOR FOR THOSE WHO TRY.**

III. BETTING IT ALL (VS 29-30)

Are We Willing To Bet Our Lives On The Truth Of The Gospel?

Epaphroditus had nothing to be ashamed about. As verses 29-30 illustrate, he bet it all. Here is the question we need to ask ourselves. **ARE WE WILLING TO BET OUR LIVES ON THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL?** I have to say that as I examine my life, I have all sorts of other personal goals that come before the gospel. Like I said before, I don't think that I have performed any great acts of courage or sacrifice for Christ. Come to think of it, I don't think I have even performed any tiny acts of courage or sacrifice for Christ. I may be considered very successful by worldly standards, but now that I look at it more closely, I am pretty much a loser. Epaphroditus was a real winner.

A. SHARING THE WINNINGS (29)

In verse 29 Paul encourages sharing the winnings. Paul wants to make sure there is no talk in the Philippian church about Epaphroditus being a failure. Epaphroditus gave up his job, his family and friends in order to minister to Paul on behalf of the Philippian church. They are to give him a hero's welcome. He is to be honored. After all, he almost died on the mission. For Paul and for Jesus, Epaphroditus' life was a huge success. He is a hero of the faith. And he deserves a hero's welcome.

B. NO GUTS NO GLORY (30)

Verse 30 challenges us with the thought, *no guts no glory*. In other words, those of us that live our safe, comfortable lives, serving God with our convenience, will never be heroes. Remember last week I said that God was writing all sorts of stories in which we were the heroes of the story. But in order to be a hero, we have to risk. This is a very interesting verse and the vocabulary comes from the world of gambling. Epaphroditus is to be honored because he risked it all. The word for *risking it all* means to *bet it all*. And Epaphroditus' name means *honored by the goddess Aphrodite*. It means charming or winsome.

Here is the interesting picture Paul paints. A local, ordinary, working guy finds himself in Las Vegas . He buys himself chips with all his money and wanders over to the crap tables. It is his turn to role. He has a feeling so he looks down at the stacks of chips he has in front of him, thinks for a moment, shoves all the chips onto the line, picks up the dice, blows on them, and starts shaking them in his hand. He is the gambler described in the verse here. The gamblers were known as *parabolani*. All the people around the table have placed their bets down as well. As the gambler throws the dice, everybody yells, "*Epaphroditus!*" which means something like, "Give us a little love here Aphrodite!" If he wins, he is a hero. Everyone around the table is yelling and screaming and patting him on the back. If he loses, he becomes the topic of discussion over dinner. People would say, "That sure took a lot of guts," or others would say, "That guy was crazy." But the point was, crazy or courageous, he was willing to risk it all and put it all on the line.

The stakes were high. How much did Epaphroditus risk? He risked losing his family and friends. He risked looking like a failure. He risked, and in fact almost lost, his life. He put it all on the line for Paul. He put it all on the line for Jesus. He put it all on the line for the church in Philippi .

IV. EPILOGUE

I can't speak for any of you, but I can tell you that compared to Epaphroditus, I am a pretty pathetic example of a Christian. We have all sorts of problems in our lives. Perhaps that is because we are not very good at risking. We whine about leaving our "comfort zones." By that we mean something like, "I don't think I can approach a newcomer at church." or "I don't think I could teach a Bible lesson." What risks are there for us to take in our safe, pathetic brand of Christianity? We haven't risked anything for Christ financially, spiritually, physically, or emotionally. I'm not sure what God is asking us to risk here at Devon Church as individuals and as a church body. But I do know this. Paul said that we are to take a courageous stand together against the world. That means criticizing the culture, the social institutions, the arts, the music, the government and even churches when they are out of step with God. What are we risking, a little embarrassment?

We are to take a stand of humility in building unity in this church through sacrificial love and sacrificial service. What risk are we taking here ... the loss of a little pride? When called upon to not follow society, when called upon to humble ourselves in relationships, we are betting that Jesus is Who He says He is and that He means what He says in the Bible. Here is the question. **ARE WE WILLING TO BET OUR LIVES ON THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL?**

I'm betting on the fact that this portion of the letter is not Paul just giving the Philippians his travel plans. I think he is giving the Philippians two living examples of what he thinks it takes to stand together against the world and what it takes to bring unity to the church. When I look at the lives of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, I'm convicted that I have been taking an intellectual approach to Christianity. However, **CHRISTIANITY IS NOT MERELY AN INTELLECTUAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, OR THEOLOGICAL EXERCISE. IT IS MEANT TO BE LIVED OUT IN THE CONTEXT OF EVERYDAY LIFE. IT IS BETTING OUR LIVES ON THE LIFE OF JESUS.** Most of us in the church today resemble the run of the mill Christians in Paul's Rome or in the city of Philippi. We have not really risked much at all serving Christ. Those in the early church risked everything to believe in and to serve Christ.

In his commentary on Philippians, William Barclay commented on what it meant to gamble everything on Christ. He says,

"In the days of the early Church, there was an association of men and

women called the parabolani, the gamblers. It was their aim to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. In AD 252, plague broke out in Carthage ; the people threw out the bodies of their dead and fled in terror. Cyprian, the Christian bishop, gathered his congregation together and put them to work burying the dead and nursing the sick in that plague-stricken city; and by so doing, at the risk of their lives, they saved the city from destruction and desolation.

In all Christians, there should be an almost reckless courage which makes them ready to gamble with their lives to serve Christ and other people."

Jesus gave it all. Paul gave it all. Timothy and Epaphroditus risked everything. Do our lives really demonstrate that we are risking it all for Christ?