

"The Characteristics of a Godly Servant"  
(Philippians 2:25-30)

Introduction: Christians are to be examples to the world of Christ-likeness, but how are they to do this? This is a question that we should frequently be asking ourselves, and searching the Scriptures to find the answer. Time is continually changing everything around us, people, society, everything, but the wonderful thing about the truth of Scripture is that it is timeless, it may be applied to any age and to any culture and always be perfectly relevant, because it is the standard. It is the handbook on human life, just like an owner's guide on a car or appliance. It tells us what God intends for us to be, and what He intends for us to do. And so when we want to learn about God's will for our lives, we know that we can always go to the Scriptures and find exactly what we need to know. This is a very important question for the Christian, for we only have so much time and so much opportunity in life. Soon all our time will be spent and we will be standing before the Lord to give an account of the stewardship that He entrusted to us. It is of vital importance, therefore, to know what the will of God is, and that we do it with all of our hearts.

You will recall that Paul gave us a simple answer to this question a few verses earlier in his epistle. He said, "HAVE THIS ATTITUDE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS" (2:5). This is really a summary of what the Christian life is: Christ-likeness. Paul did not leave us in the dark to guess what that attitude, or mind, of Christ is, but he has been revealing it to us in this epistle. It consists in not being selfish or conceited, but rather in being humble; of not looking out merely for your own well-being, but also the well-being of others; of being of the same mind with one another, having the same love for each another, being united and intent on one purpose, namely, the furtherance of the kingdom of God. It consists in working diligently for your Lord and Savior out of a heart of love for Him and for your neighbor, of doing all your acts of love without complaining or arguing, of doing the will of God as it is revealed in the Bible with all your might, and of rejoicing in everything that God brings into your life by His Providence, if it turns out for His greater glory. In short, it is the giving up of yourself, all your goals and aspirations and desires unto Christ, to live no longer for yourself, but for His glory alone.

But again, Paul does not merely give to us the qualifications of Christ-likeness without illustration. He does not tell us the truth without painting a picture. In the course of his letter to the Philippians, he gives to us two persons as models of the Christian life for our instruction. Two weeks ago we saw Timothy's example, who was like Christ in that he sought after the things of God rather than his own things, and that not by words only, but by a life of kingdom service. This morning we will want to consider the life of Epaphroditus, a man that Paul deeply cared about, a man that Paul considered to be his brother in the Lord, a man that Paul believed deserved the honor of all the Christians at Philippi because he risked his life in the service of Christ. And what I want you to see this morning in the life of Epaphroditus is that,

***A Christian's life, whether young or old, must reflect that of his Lord's and he must be willing to make any sacrifice***

necessary to see His Lord's work accomplished.

As we consider Epaphroditus's life, examine your life to see whether or not these Christ-like qualities are in you.

- I. Christian, You Are to Consider Yourself in the Bonds of Brotherly Love with the People of God.
  - A. Paul Called Epaphroditus His Brother in the Lord and Loved Him as Such.
    1. In the Christian community, our relationship to one another is represented in family terms.
      - a. God is our Father and we are all brothers and sisters.
      - b. This is not just an illustration, but a reality. We are members of God's household.
    2. Jesus Himself, as to His humanity, described His relationship to us in the same terms.
      - a. The author to the Hebrews writes, "FOR BOTH HE WHO SANCTIFIES AND THOSE WHO ARE SANCTIFIED ARE ALL FROM ONE FATHER, FOR WHICH REASON HE IS NOT ASHAMED TO CALL THEM BRETHREN, SAYING, 'I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE" (2:11-12).
      - b. Christ became one with us as to our humanity, in order that we might be adopted into the family of God, and become His brethren.
  - B. You Have Been Adopted into the Family of God through Faith in Christ and Are Brethren.
    1. You all have one Father, and you are the brothers and sisters of one another.
    2. Therefore Christ calls you to treat your brethren with the same kind of love and care that you would your earthly relatives, only more so.
      - a. Often times this truth doesn't affect us at all. We call each other Christian brothers and sisters, but do we really treat each other that way?
      - b. Examine your relationships with your earthly brothers and sisters. You certainly care for them, and would do anything to help them.
      - c. You must likewise love and serve your brethren in the Lord. They are your family, your eternal family which you will have forever.
      - d. You should be willing to do everything for them that you would do for your earthly family.
- II. Christian, You Are to See Yourselves as Co-Laborers with One Another in God's Vineyard.
  - A. Paul Called Epaphroditus His Fellow Worker.
    1. Those who helped Paul in his work of the Gospel were frequently given this title by him.
      - a. Priscilla and Aquila, Urbane, Timothy, Mark, Aristarcus, Demas, and Luke are just some of those mentioned by Paul as those who labored with him.
      - b. They were so-called because they were working together with Paul, striving for the furtherance of the Gospel. Paul says, "FOR WE ARE GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS; YOU ARE GOD'S FIELD, GOD'S BUILDING" (1 Cor. 3:9).

2. *Jesus, the Lord of the Harvest, Himself entered the fields and commanded His followers to pray that more laborers would enter it.*
  - a. *His life was a life of labor and hardship in the work which the Father had given Him to accomplish.*
  - b. *"JESUS SAID TO THEM, 'MY FOOD IS TO DO THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME, AND TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK'" (John 4:34).*
  - c. *Jesus set the example for His disciples to labor as He did, and to beseech the Lord of the Harvest that He would send more workers into His fields.*

*B. Christ Has Called You as well to be Fellow Laborers in His Fields with Your Brethren.*

1. *The kingdom is to be built with much effort.*
  - a. *It takes much work to sow the field of the kingdom.*
  - b. *As it is with some crops, so it is with this work: it takes much labor to bring it to full maturity.*
  - c. *But it also takes a lot of effort to reap the fields.*
2. *And Christian, Christ has given that responsibility to you.*
  - a. *There is much sowing of the seed of the Word that needs to be done by preaching and witnessing.*
  - b. *There is the much needed watering of the seed planted through further prayer and instruction that is yet lacking.*
  - c. *And there is much harvesting that yet remains.*
  - d. *Pray that the Lord would raise up yourself and your brethren and strengthen you for this task.*

*III. Christian, You Are to Be United with Your Brethren in the Spiritual Battle of the Ages.*

*A. Paul Called Epaphroditus His Fellow Soldier Because He Fought by His Side in the Great Battle Between the Two Kingdoms.*

1. *Another familiar image in the Scriptures of the Christian life is one of warfare.*
  - a. *There are two kingdoms which are constantly at war with one another.*
  - b. *There was originally one kingdom of God, before our father Adam handed it over to the devil.*
  - c. *But with the intrusion of the grace of God into that dismal situation, the kingdom of God has been present and growing, and as it does, there is a terrible battle being waged.*
  - d. *Satan doesn't give ground easily.*
2. *Christ Himself is the captain of the host of the Lord who wages war with the kingdom of the devil.*
  - a. *He is the One who appeared to Joshua to lead him into the battle as the Israelites were preparing to take the promised land.*
  - b. *When Joshua, not realizing who he was, asked, "ARE YOU FOR US OR FOR OUR ADVERSARIES?", He replied, "NO, RATHER I INDEED COME NOW AS CAPTAIN OF THE HOST OF THE LORD. AND JOSHUA FELL ON HIS FACE TO THE EARTH" (Joshua 5:13-14).*

- c. Christ continues to lead His people into the warfare against the devil and his demons.
  - B. And Since Christ Has Called You into His Army, You Are to Fight the Good Fight of Faith Joining Hands with the People of God.
    - 1. The battle continues to be fought even until this day and will until the day of consummation; it did not end in the first century.
      - a. The battle which began so long ago in the garden is not yet finished.
      - b. The war has been won by Christ, but there is yet much territory to be taken, before Christ comes to establish His eternal kingdom.
    - 2. The Lord of Hosts has enlisted you in His army, and He calls upon you to fight it bravely.
      - a. All of you who are here this morning are in the battle, on one of two sides, Christ's or Satan's.
      - b. If you are Christ's, then you are to be fighting on His side. How have you been doing in the battle? Are you taking ground, holding your own, or falling back?
      - c. Fight bravely for the Captain of the Lord's Hosts. Put on His spiritual armor. Wield skillfully as a sword the Word of truth. Pray without ceasing. Be willing to risk anything for the advancement of His kingdom. Don't sit back while your brethren, who are greatly outnumbered, fight alone!
- IV. Christian, You Are to Be Willing to Be Sent to Do the Lord's Work if He Requires It of You.
  - A. Epaphroditus Was Sent as an Apostle of the Church at Philippi to Minister to Paul on Their Behalf.
    - 1. Sometimes it is necessary for the Christian to leave the church that nurtures him and to serve the Lord in another field.
      - a. Paul had a need in that Roman prison, and the Philippian's met that need by sending their brother Epaphroditus.
      - b. Paul, on many occasions, sent his companions to other cities to do the work of Christ there.
      - c. And throughout the ages, the church has sent forth missionaries to the four corners of the earth, to bring the Gospel message to those in darkness.
    - 2. We must not forget that Christ Himself was sent into this world by the Father to accomplish His will.
      - a. Jesus said, "I HAVE COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, NOT TO MY OWN WILL, BUT THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME" (John 6:38).
      - b. Jesus submitted to His Father's will and came down from heaven to accomplish all of the Father's good pleasure in bringing His people back to God.
- B. Are You also Willing to Be Sent if the Lord Should Call You

to Go?

1. The need still exists for missionaries to go into foreign lands and preach the Gospel.
  - a. Much of the world yet remains unevangelized.
  - b. There are yet many ethnic groups which have never heard the Gospel in their language.
2. Would you be willing to go and take it to them if the Lord should call you?
  - a. The question is not, "Are you able?" for many of you here this morning may not be able.
  - b. But the question is, If you were able, would you be willing? If the Lord called you children to go when you were older, would you go? If the Lord called you adults who are able, would you go? And for you who are no longer able, would you have gone if the Lord had bidden you to go?
  - c. It is the willingness to do whatever the Lord calls you to do that allows you to rightly call Him Lord and Savior.

V. Christian, You Are to Be Willing to Serve the Needs of Your Brethren.

- A. Epaphroditus was willing to become the servant of Paul in prison to minister to his needs.
  1. The life of the Christian is one of service.
    - a. The reference here to service is not just any good deed, but rather the specific work of the Gospel.
    - b. Paul tells us that this is the reason that God redeemed us in the first place, "FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND, THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM" (Eph. 2:10).
    - c. Paul further tells us in Titus 2:14, that Christ "GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM EVERY LAWLESS DEED AND PURIFY FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, ZEALOUS FOR GOOD DEEDS."
  2. Jesus Himself did not come to be served, but to serve.
    - a. He instructed and disciplined His followers for three years on earth.
    - b. He washed their feet during the Last Supper as an example to them that they should so serve one another (John 13:5-20).
    - c. And He continues to serve His people through His work of intercession in heaven.
- B. Christ Has Called You to Serve Your Brethren through Your God Given Gifts.
  1. The need for the exercise of your gifts will always continue in the church as long as it is on this side of glory.
    - a. They were given for the the good of all the members. Paul says, "BUT TO EACH ONE IS GIVEN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE COMMON GOOD" (1 Cor. 12:7).
    - b. They were given so that the whole body might reach

maturity in Christ. "WE ARE TO GROW UP IN ALL ASPECTS INTO HIM, WHO IS THE HEAD, EVEN CHRIST, FROM WHOM THE WHOLE BODY, BEING FITTED AND HELD TOGETHER BY THAT WHICH EVERY JOINT SUPPLIES, ACCORDING TO THE PROPER WORKING OF EACH INDIVIDUAL PART, CAUSES THE GROWTH OF THE BODY FOR THE BUILDING UP OF ITSELF IN LOVE" (Eph. 4:15-16).

2. Are you using what the Lord has given you to benefit your brethren?
  - a. This is a reminder to you that the Lord calls you to be active in the church and outside of it in bearing fruit for His glory.
  - b. He wants you to be zealous for good deeds, not reluctant. He wants whole-hearted service, not that which is half-hearted.
  - c. Now is the time to examine your branches and to see if there is any fruit on them.

VI. Christian, You Are to Love Your Brethren Enough to Be Concerned for Their Welfare.

- A. Epaphroditus Fell Ill in His Ministering to Paul, but His Main Concern Was for the Philippians Who Had Heard that He Was Sick.
  1. The Christian is to be concerned, not for his own welfare alone, but for that of his brethren.
    - a. Epaphroditus showed his concern for the apostle Paul by going to him in Rome and waiting upon him.
    - b. He also showed his concern for the Philippians when they heard that he was sick. He seemed to be more concerned for them than for himself, although he was the one who was sick.
    - c. We saw this trait with Timothy as well who was not looking out for his own interests, but laid them aside to be a servant of Christ.
  2. Our Lord did not focus on His own needs alone, for if He had, then atonement would never have been made for His people.
    - a. When Christ became tired, He would still place the needs of the people around Him before His own.
    - b. When He was thirsty, He ministered to the woman of Samaria, rather than focusing on His thirst.
    - c. If He had merely focused on His own comfort, then He never would have endured the fiery ordeal that was necessary to redeem His people.
- B. Christ Calls You to Be More Concerned with the Welfare of Your Brethren.
  1. The lack of this may be one of the church's greatest problems.
    - a. We all tend to be self-centered to one degree or another.
    - b. Do you ever stop to take account of how your brothers and sisters are faring financially, physically, and especially spiritually?
  2. Each of us needs to be interested and involved in each other's lives and be concerned for one another.

- a. There are always needs in the church to be met such as nursery workers, Sunday School teachers, VBS teachers and helpers, custodial services, general maintenance and upkeep, all of which benefit someone else.
- b. There are needs in the congregation that need to be met such as showing one another hospitality, admonishing one another to love and good deeds, etc.
- c. When we see our brethren sinning, we need to approach them and humbly tell them their fault and seek to bring them to repentance.
- d. We must learn to get our eyes off of ourselves and not think that everyone should serve us, while we ourselves do not lift a finger to serve another.

VII. And Lastly, Christian, You Ought to Be Willing to Serve Christ Even if It Means that You Must Give Your Life for Him.

- A. Epaphroditus Was Willing to Serve His Lord Even to the Point of Death.
  1. Christians throughout the ages have been called by Christ to give their lives in His service.
    - a. Paul was beheaded, Peter was crucified upside down, John Hus was burned at the stake, as well as William Tyndale.
    - b. Jesus told us that the Christian life entailed a laying down of our lives, so that the actual giving up of it would not be too much to ask. He said, "IF ANYONE WISHES TO COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME. FOR WHOEVER WISHES TO SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT; BUT WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE SHALL FIND IT" (Matt. 16:24-25).
  2. Christ, in bringing many sons to glory, was lifted up on the cross and gave His life a ransom for many. He would never call us to do something that He Himself was not willing to do for us.
- B. You Are Likewise to Be Willing to Give up Your Life in the Service of Christ.
  1. When Christ called you to Himself, you lost the ownership and control of your own life, in order to become His.
    - a. You have been purchased with a price, therefore you are no longer your own.
    - b. You have died and your life is hid with God in Christ.
  2. Are you be willing to put your life in danger for Christ's sake and the Gospel's? I believe that God will provide the grace when it is needed. But are you willing to give up your life for Christ?
  3. Paul said that those who serve in this way are to be counted worthy of honor.
    - a. Paul greatly loved Epaphroditus and told the Philippians to hold men such as him in great esteem.

- b. You too ought to esteem highly the many men and women who daily brave the dangers of living for Christ where it is not popular, and those who have given their lives for Christ.
  - c. And, if the Lord should in His providence give you such an opportunity, then rejoice, for it is a great honor to give your life for the One who gave His life to save you.
4. People of God, there are many lessons for us here in the life of Epaphroditus.
- a. He was a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, a missionary, a servant of the Word, a man concerned for the welfare of others, and a man willing to serve even unto death.
  - b. But we should not think him to be unusual; he is not a super-Christian.
  - c. Rather, he is what Christ calls all of us to be, for he is only reflecting the life of His Master.
  - d. May God grant to you that you may reflect this Christ-likeness in your lives as well! Amen.