

The Christian Temper as Illustrated in the Friends of Paul

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon explores the characteristics of true Christian friendship and service through the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Scripture: Philippians 2:20

Topics: "Christian Fellowship", "Selfless Service"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the exemplary Christian temper as demonstrated by the friends of Paul, particularly focusing on Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy is portrayed as a loyal and selfless helper, embodying the spirit of service and sacrifice, while Epaphroditus exemplifies a considerate friend who risked his life to support Paul. Both figures illustrate the qualities of humility, devotion, and unselfishness that are essential for true Christian fellowship and service. Simpson encourages believers to aspire to these noble characteristics, which reflect the heart of Christ in their relationships and ministries. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper commitment to serving others in love and humility, as modeled by these faithful companions of Paul.

Transcript

"For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state.

"For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

"But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

"Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, 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 in all gladness; and hold such in reputation" (Phil. 2: 20-22; 2: 25-30).

There is no brighter galaxy of beautiful lives than the cluster of friends that circled around the Apostle Paul. Their personality stands out in bold relief in his various epistles. The figures of Aquila and Priscilla, Silas and Barnabas, Tychicus and Trophimus, Onesiphorus and Epaphroditus, Timothy and Titus, Luke and even Mark, stand out as familiar friends. Their relations with the great Apostle were most intimate, affectionate and helpful. With a heart peculiarly sensitive and loving, his whole being was open to every tie of holy friendship, and the glimpses his letters give us of these sacred friendships are full of the rarest touches of lofty character and nobility.

Two special pictures are given in the texts we have quoted.

I. TIMOTHY, OR THE LOYAL HELPER

The relation of Timothy to Paul was filial. "To Timothy, my own son in the gospel" was Paul's usual salutation to his beloved disciple. Converted to God through the ministry of Paul, adopted by him from the beginning of his Christian life as his disciple, companion and helper, and associated with him till the very close of the Apostle's career in the most intimate and confidential relations, he could say of him, "I have no one so dear, who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him that as a son with a father, so he hath labored with me in the Gospel."

1. He was a helper. It is not easy to take the second place. It needs more grace to be a good helper than a good principal. There are plenty of people who are willing to take a subordinate place for a time to serve some ultimate ambition, but it takes a rare quality of humility and devotion to fit into second place and live to carry out the plans and objects which another has originated. And yet this is the true spirit of the New Testament. "The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them. . . . But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." One of the most successful of modern missionaries went to the field in the first instance as the body-servant of a missionary, and God honored him afterwards equally with his former master and made the name of Marshman immortal among the records of noble lives. "My helpers in Christ Jesus." This clause included many of the noblest lives in apostolic times. This is the trust that is given to most of us. May God make us true "helpers in Christ Jesus."

2. Timothy was a true-hearted and loyal helper. In every age truth and honor have been counted sacred, and treachery base. The ethics of Christianity give no lower place to loyalty, and among the signs of the declension and apostasy of the Last Days, are mentioned "truce-breakers, covenant breakers." A man who will be false to his fellow man will also prove recreant to his trust and to his God, if the temptation and inducement are only sufficiently strong. Let us ask God to make us true to every trust.

3. Timothy was an unselfish and disinterested helper and fellow-worker. Paul had found few such. Even in apostolic days men used the Christian ministry to further selfish ends. "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state." But here was one true-hearted shepherd who only desired the good of the flock and the things that would please the Chief Shepherd. It was more than human friendship; it was more than loyalty to a leader; it was more than zeal for a cause -- it was a love for souls that "would naturally care for [their] state." It was the heart of the Master in the minister, pitying, sympathizing, entering into the very needs and conditions of the flock and caring for them even as Christ would care. Without this there can be no true service. "I seek not yours, but

you," the true-hearted Apostle could say. And so every true minister of Christ should be filled with the unselfish love, the disinterested aim, the shepherd heart -- the very bowels of Jesus Christ toward the people for whom we stand in the Master's name. All others are but hirelings. These only are the true under-shepherds of the sheep.

II. EPAPHRODITUS, OR THE CONSIDERATE FRIEND

The story of Epaphroditus is unique. He belonged to the church in Philippi, and was sent to Rome by the Philippian Church while Paul was there in prison. He was probably one of the elders or pastors of the Philippian Church. Hearing of the Apostle's sufferings, he made strenuous exertions to find him out and minister to him, and through his violent over-exertions, he became ill himself and even dangerously ill. But so unselfish was he that he took special pains to conceal the knowledge of his sickness from his friends in Philippi lest they should be anxious about him. And when at length he found that they had heard the tidings "he was full of heaviness" because they had heard that he had been sick. At length however God graciously restored him to health and spared the Apostle the bitter sorrow which his death would have caused him, and Paul now sends him back to the Philippians as the bearer of this epistle, and commends him to their confidence and love as one who "for the work of Christ was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me."

There are some exquisitely fine touches of character in this picture:

1. The Spirit of Service. Epaphroditus had gone from Philippi to Rome to carry to Paul the gifts of the Philippian Christians and to assist the Apostle in his work. And Paul speaks of him as "my companion in labor, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants."

He was undoubtedly a spiritual worker, and able to minister Christ to the souls of men. But he was not above the humblest ministration of help to the bodies of men. He carried with his own hands the gifts of his brethren to the lone Apostle at Rome, and doubtless ministered personally with lowly service to his physical necessities. Beloved, are we ministering to Christ's suffering ones? Are we seeking out His poor, His sick, His prisoners, and doing it as unto Him?

2. The Spirit of Sacrifice. But he went farther. He risked his very life to minister to Paul. He toiled and traveled till he became exhausted and ill. He went beyond his strength. He lingered in the cold barracks or the damp dungeon, until he contracted malignant disease and was "nigh unto death." He did it willingly, "not regarding his own life." He was glad to sacrifice as well as serve for the sake of his Master and his friend.

Beloved, how much have you sacrificed for Christ? How often have you risked your health and life in the unwholesome garret, the damp prison, the pestilential hospital, the long vigil of some sick saint's bedside, who perhaps could not afford a nurse to watch her? How often have you given up a pleasant evening with your family to carry comfort or salvation to some other soul? How often have you denied yourself some gratification or necessity that you might have something to give to Christ to send the Gospel to the perishing? These are the only badges of honor and reward in the kingdom of God. Service is only duty. When we have done all "we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." It is, only the crimson blood of sacrifice that can make us partakers of the sufferings and glory of our Lord.

3. The Spirit of Silence and Self-forgetfulness in Service and Suffering. Most people want their sacrifices known and the story of their service told in the glowing records of human praise. Their chief sorrow is the

sense of the world's neglect and want of sympathy. But here is a man whose only desire is to keep his friends from knowing of his troubles, and whose only heaviness was because they "had heard that he had been sick." So unselfish and considerate was he that he only desired to spare them the news that might bring anxiety and concern. This is very fine. It touches the deepest lines of love and Christlikeness. It is the veil of humility and the covering of unselfishness which adds to sacrifice and service a divine touch and claims for it a heavenly reward. The things we do to be seen of men, the things that others appreciate, pity, praise, of these the Master says: "They have their reward." But the things done only unto Him, and forgotten perhaps by us as soon as done, or esteemed as of small account because it was merely second nature for us to do them, of these He says, "Thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." The happy souls who are to sit on the right hand of the King when He comes in the glory of His Father, and hear Him say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; For I was an hungred and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink" -- will have forgotten all about their service and will answer, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?" But their very self-unconsciousness will but add to the value of their service, and the greatness of their reward in the day when He shall "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."

Now the qualities we have been describing are among the finest touches of character. One may be a sincere Christian, and an irreproachable and righteous man, and not possess them. Yes; but it is these fine qualities that constitute the difference between the boor and the gentleman, between the piece of charcoal and the diamond, between the sunflower and the rose, between the soul saved as by fire, and the glorified saint sweeping through the gates with an abundance entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

And it is not infrequently that a great issue is decided by what seems a trifling incident, but what really indicates some high quality beneath. The fact that three hundred of Gideon's ten thousand men lapped up the water when they drank, showed that they alone possessed the qualities that could be depended upon in the crisis hour. The fact that the widow of Zarephath was willing to give up her last handful of meal and her last drop of oil, marked in her spirit a quality which prepared her in later years to receive back her boy as the first to rise from the dead. The readiness of Abraham to give up his only son at God's command was but a straw on the tide of his life, but it showed the bent and purpose of his being, and God could say, "Now I know that thou fearest God." The simple incident in Daniel's history when he refused the royal dainties and stuck to his simple fare, was an index to his entire character and demonstrated the fixed purpose, the inflexible principle, and the self-denying simplicity of the man whom God could depend upon in any test. These may seem trifles; "but trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." These may not be among "the things that are true and the things that are pure," but they are among "the things that are lovely," and God wants us to be arrayed "in the beauty of holiness," "as well as the robes of righteousness." It is this that constitutes the difference between the justified and the sanctified, the clean robe and the marriage robe, the mere forgiveness of our sins and the great reward of him who overcomes.

God is giving us all along the way the opportunity of winning these victories, of putting on these wedding robes, of gaining these great rewards. Let us not miss the opportunity; let us not despise the proffered prize.

The soldiers of England and America have counted it the chance of a lifetime to be called to the post of danger and the opportunity of swift promotion. This is the way the heroes of Santiago, Manila, Dhargai,

and Glencoe, have looked upon their hardships and their dangers. And the verdict of history has already been pronounced, that, so far as earthly fame is worth contending for, they have not counted amiss or suffered in vain. And shall we who strive for a better crown think less of the promised prize, or complain when the trials come, through which we are permitted to win it? Shall we not rather meet every situation with holy and jealous care, forge our future crowns out of our fiery trials, turn opposition, temptation, and suffering into occasions for putting on more fully all the graces of the Spirit and all the strength of Christ; so that at last we shall stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, with that happy company of whom it shall be said: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints"? "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. . . . And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God."

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