

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

Letters Of Reference

Philippians 2:19-30

2008

Introduction

Letters of Reference: As a pastor I get fairly regular requests from people in our fellowship or in the community to write letters of reference.

Purpose of a reverence letter:

1. To affirm the character traits, skills and work ethics of an individual
2. To identify their potential value to a company or organization
3. To lend known credibility to someone trying to establish credibility

We meet two friends of the Apostle Paul in this passage -- men who displayed the character of Jesus Christ and who were excellent examples of all that Paul has written about so far in the book of Philippians.

I The Modeling of Timothy

A. Paul's expressed purpose [Verse 19]

1. He hoped in the Lord to send Timothy

When Paul came to Philippi for the first time, it was Timothy's first missionary journey with the apostle (Acts 16:1-3). In the years that followed, Timothy would visit the Philippians on several occasions and would become well known to them (Acts 18:5; 19:22; 20:1-4).

So the Philippians had known Timothy as long as they had known Paul.

1 Thess 3:2-3 "We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials."

2. He wanted to be **cheered** by news about Philippi

Cheered = Eupsuchoo = "To be encouraged or of good comfort"

What kind of news would have cheered Paul's heart?

- a. To hear an update on their overall well-being
- b. To hear that the church responded well to his letter
- c. To hear that they had welcomed and followed his directives
- d. To hear a positive update on the conflicts the church was facing:
 1. There was a problem between Euodia and Syntyche - 4:2
 2. There was theological opposition - 1:28-29
 3. There were Judaizers (dogs, evil men, mutilators of the flesh) - 3:2
 4. There were enemies of the cross - 3:18-19

3 John 3-4 “It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

B. Paul’s assessment of Timothy’s life

Timothy = “Dear to God”

- He was a native of Lystra (Acts 14:6)
- He was raised in the Lord by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15).
- He was living at Lystra when Paul made his 1st visit to that city (Acts 16:1) and was one of Paul’s converts during his 1st missionary journey (2 Tim 3:10-11)
- He had a good reputation in and out of the church - Acts 6:3-4; 1 Tim 3:7
- He accompanied Paul on his 2nd journey - Ac 16:1-3
- He was called Paul’s faithful son in the Lord (1 Cor 4:17), his “true child in faith” and a fellow worker with Paul - Rom 16:21; 1 Thess 3:2
- He was appointed to pastor the church in Ephesus - 1 Tim 1:3; 3:14

1. He was **unique** in Paul’s ministry [Verse 20]

No one else like him = Isopsuchos = “Likeminded, of similar spirit”

Phil 2:2 “... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

Note: Unity -- not uniformity!!

If believers imitate Christ (Eph 5:1), then though they have different backgrounds, personalities and ideas, they will share in common the characteristics of Christ.

Timothy has the same love and concern for the Philippians that Paul had. They were “equal-souled” in their concern for the welfare of the Philippians and the furtherance of the cause of Christ. They shared in common a love for God and a love for God’s people.

2 Cor 8:16-17 “I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.”

Application: Discipleship!

That’s a great reminder of the fact that you may spend a life time in ministry and when you come down to the end find that you have been indeed rich if you have produced one who is like you.

a. He took a genuine **interest** in their welfare

Genuine = Gnesios = Real, authentic”

He had the heart of a true undershepherd. He was an example of someone who truly sought the needs of others first. He was a living testimony, an “incarnation,” if you will, of the principle in 2:4.

Phil 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Paul’s example: 1 Cor 10:33-11:1 “For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

2. He was not like everyone else: [Verse 21]

a. Who look out for their **own** interest

Look out = Merimnao = “To be anxious or concerned about”

The Bible normally discourages anxiety in believers (Phil 4:6-7). But in this case, Timothy was commended for his concern for the church.

Application: It is rare to find someone who is selflessly others-centered
John 10:11-13 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

b. Who do not look to the interest of **Jesus Christ**

Do not look = Zeteo = “To seek or worship God”

The idea is Timothy is consumed with the interests of Christ Jesus. This is a man who is single-minded.

Matt 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Quote: Billy Graham’s eulogy for Dawson Trotman, president of Navigators who drowned at Schroon Lake, New York while saving one of his disciples. He was particular interested on the focus on Dawson's single- mindedness. He said at the funeral, quote: "Here was a man who did not say these forty things I dabble at, but this one thing I do!"

3. He had **proved** himself [Verse 22a]

Proved = Dokime = “Tested and tried with proven character”

1 Tim 3:10 “[Deacons] must first be tested.”

This kind of testing is not proven in school but proven in service. Not proven by a test, but proven through testings. Not proven in times of ease, but in times of difficulty, in time of heartache, in times of challenge.

It reminds me once again of that wonderful Greek word: **Prokope!!**

Application: Are you a man or woman of proven character?

4. He was like a son to Paul [Verse 22b]
Paul referred to Timothy as his “true son in the faith.” 1 Tim 1:2

Application: Be a son or daughter who brings blessing to your father!
Prov 15:20 “A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother.”

1. He **served** with Paul in the work of the gospel
Served = Douleuo = “To be a voluntary slave”
Note: Paul doesn't say he served Paul or that he served under Paul. He says that Timothy served WITH Paul!
- 2 Cor 4:5 “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”

- C. Paul's desire for information [Verse 23-24]
1. He hoped to send Timothy as soon as he knew how things would go for him
 2. He was **confident** in the Lord that he would come to them
Phil 1:25-26 “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”

II The Modeling of Epaphroditus

- A. Paul's intention to send Epaphroditus [Verse 25a]
Epaphroditus = “Handsome or charming”
While Epaphroditus was well known to the Philippian saints, he is not well known to us. His name appears only twice in the entire NT (Phil 2:25; 4:18).
1. We don't know anything about his background
 2. We don't know anything about his parents
 3. We don't know how long he had been a Christian
 4. We don't know what his function was in the church

There is nothing said to lead us to believe that his ministry was especially dynamic, unforgettable, or earthshaking. In a sense, he becomes every man's spiritual hero and role model.

- B. Paul's assessment of Epaphroditus [Verse 25b]
1. He was a dear **brother**
Brother = Adelphos = “A brother in Christ to the apostle Paul”
Eph 6:21-22 “Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.”

What does he mean by “brother”?

1. They share common redemption in Jesus Christ
2. They share a common indwelling of the Holy Spirit
3. They share the common bond of agape love
4. They share a common mission -- sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ
5. They share a common hope of the resurrection and life everlasting!

2. He was a fellow worker

Fellow worker = Sunergos = “Co-laborer”

This term occurs 13 times in the New Testament -- 12 times by Paul and always in reference to a shared commitment to the furtherance of the gospel.

Application: Are you experiencing the camaraderie of serving God?

1 Cor 3:9 “For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.”

3. He was a fellow **soldier**

Fellow soldier = Sustratiotes = “Warrior”

He used the term on only one other occasion (Philemon 2) where he refers to Archippus as “our fellow-soldier.” The term refers to a person who has fought the battles and endured the hardships associated with the preaching of the gospel and ministering to people. Someone who has:

- a. Battled against Satan and his schemes
- b. Battled against the world and its corruption
- c. Battled against the flesh and been victorious

2 Tim 2:3-4 “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.”

4. He was a messenger from the Philippians

Messenger = Apostolos = “Apostle or ambassador”

Not ‘Apostle’ with a capital ‘A’ meaning one of the 12, but ‘apostle’ with a small ‘a’ meaning a church-planter, evangelist, ambassador for Christ.

Application: If you are believer, you are already a messenger -- good or bad!

John 20:21 “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

5. He was a **servant** to Paul’s needs

Epaphroditus was also a **minister** (leitourgos) to Paul’s needs. The OT priestly background to this term is unmistakable. Epaphroditus had served as their “minister” (*leitourgon*), functioning officially on their behalf in performing a sacred and sacrificial service to Paul -- not only by bringing their financial gift, but even more so with a laid down life.

Rom 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

C. Paul's description of Epaphroditus' sacrifice [Verse 26-27]

1. He **longed** for the believers in Philippi

Longed = Epipotheo = “To yearn for or intensely desire”

Paul uses this term twice in Philippians to describe the depth of his love for each and every one of them:

Phil 1:8 “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Phil 4:1 “Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”

2. He was distressed that they had heard he was ill

Distressed = Ademoneo = “To be full of heaviness”

Note: Epaphroditus was not concerned because he was sick, but that his illness caused his fellow believers so much concern and anxiety!

It is used only two other times in the New Testament, both in reference to the internal, emotional, and spiritual agony suffered by Jesus during his arrest, trial and crucifixion (Matt 26:37-38; Mark 14:33).

Application: When was the last time you were that distressed over someone else's problems?

3. He was ill and almost **died**

The text doesn't inform us of the cause of Epaphroditus' illness.

4. He was spared by God's mercy

Mercy = Eleeo = “Not getting what we deserve!”

There is nothing in the text to indicate that this was a miraculous healing, but Paul still saw God's hand of mercy in Epaphroditus' recovery.

Ps 41:1-3 “Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.”

- a. Protecting Paul additional **sorrow**

Sorrow = Lupe = “Sadness, grief, heaviness”

Literally, “Sorrow upon sorrow”

1. Sorrow at the loss of a friend and fellow worker
2. Sorrow that the loss occurred while assisting Paul

John 16:22 “So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

D. Paul’s intention [Verse 28]

1. He was eager to send Epaphroditus back
 - a. To **gladden** the hearts of the church
 - b. To lessen Paul’s **anxiety** about the church

Less sorrow = Alupoteros = “To be without grief”

Prov 12:25 “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.”

Prov 25:25 “Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.”

E. Paul’s instructions: [Verse 29-30]

1. Welcome him in the Lord with great **joy**

Welcome = Prosdechomai = “To accept or receive”

Matt 10:40 “He who receives you receives me ...”

Thus the Philippians were to highly esteem Epaphroditus -- to hold nothing back in their estimation and affection for him.
2. **Honor** men like him

Honor = Entimos = “To value, hold dear, consider precious”

This term is used five times in the New Testament (Lk 7:2; 14:8; Phil 2:29; 1 Pt 2:4,6) and always refers to a person’s high rank.

In other words, Paul is telling the Philippians to hold Epaphroditus in high regard. Hold him as highly prized and valued.

Application: As believers, we are to honor men like him!

1 Tim 5:17 “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor ...”

- a. Because he almost died for the work of Christ

What brought him close to death? The work of Christ.

Quote: Lightfoot

“It seems plain from this expression that Epaphroditus’ illness was the consequence not of persecution but of over-exertion.”

Illustration: Gospel for Asia students preaching the gospel in Hindu villages

- b. Because he **risked** his life in their place

Risked his life = Parableuomai = “To disregard”

Quote: William Barclay

“The word for "risked his life" is a gambler's word and means to stake everything on a turn of the dice. Paul is saying that for the sake of Jesus Christ Epaphroditus gambled his life. 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.

It is the kind of life that Jesus led:

1 John 3:16 “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”

It is the kind of life that Paul led:

Acts 15:25-26 “So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul -- men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Illustration: Father Damien in Kalaupapa, Moloka'i

He landed in Honolulu on March 19, 1864 at the age of 24.

He was ordained to the priesthood on May 21, 1864.

He served in several parishes until an outbreak of Hansen's Disease.

King Kamehameha V quarantined the lepers to Kalaupapa, Moloka'i.

Father Damien arrived on May 10, 1873 and was introduced to the 816 lepers by Bishop Maigret who presented Damien as “one who will be a father to you, and who loves you so much that he does not hesitate to become one of you; to live and die with you.”

He loved and served the lepers of Kalaupapa for the next 16 years.

He died of leprosy on April 15, 1889 at the age of 49.

Application: What have you risked in your service to Christ?**Conclusion**

If Paul were to write a letter of reference for you, what would he say about your faith?

Your modeling Christ-likeness? Your faithfulness in marriage? Your parenting?

Your diligence at work? Your love for others? Your commitment to sharing the gospel?

The church today needs more people like these two men -- Timothy and Epaphroditus:

1. Leaders who love the Lord and love His people!
2. Leaders who walk worthily of Christ and find their greatest joy in serving Him!
3. Leaders who are willing to take risks to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ!

*Copyright, Bob Hallman, 1996-2020, All Rights Reserved.
Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the
New International Version ©1984 by International Bible Society.*