

THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS

III. Philippians: Nurture In Living In Preoccupation With Christ

I. Nurture In Living Selflessly Humble Lives As Exemplified In Godly Believers (Philippians 2:17-30)

I. Introduction

- A. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, his readers were concerned about his imprisonment for the Christian faith, a fact that is evidenced in Paul's words in Philippians 1:12-13.
- B. To nurture his readers, Paul taught them to live humbly selfless lives in relating to one another (Philippians 2:1-16), and then he provided illustrations of such living in godly believers in Philippians 2:17-30.
- C. We view that passage for insight on the practical realities of living selflessly humble lives (as follows):

II. Nurture In Living Selflessly Humble Lives As Exemplified In Godly Believers, Philippians 2:17-30.

- A. Paul illustrated humble selflessness in his own ministry unto the Philippian believers in Philippians 2:17-19:
 - a. The Greek verb *spendomai* in Philippians 2:17 that is variously translated "offered upon" (KJV) and "poured out" (NIV, ESV) refers to "a drink offering given as a sacrifice to God," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 656, 758. This verb used elsewhere of himself by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:6 NIV, ESV where he clearly meant it to refer to his impending martyrdom.
 - b. Thus, Paul wrote in Philippians 2:17 that even if he were not released from prison, but died as a martyr for his ministry to the Philippians, he would be glad and rejoice with his readers were they to live rightly humbly and considerately relating to each other in a good testimony as he had urged (Philippians 2:14-16).
 - c. Paul wanted his readers to be glad with him if he was to be martyred for them in God's will, and he wrote he would send Timothy to them to report back the joyful news of their discipleship, Phil. 2:18-19.
- B. Paul illustrated humble selflessness in the ministry of his co-worker, Timothy, in Philippians 2:20-24:
 - a. In announcing that he would send Timothy to his readers, Paul wrote that he had no one else at hand like Timothy who would have a genuine interest in their welfare, Philippians 2:20 NIV, ESV.
 - b. To explain, Paul wrote that, unlike others, Timothy sought the interests of Christ, not his own interests, and he had proved this fact in having served Paul as a son serves his father in Paul's gospel ministry as an apostle, Philippians 2:21-22.
 - c. Thus, Paul planned to send Timothy to his readers as soon as he received the verdict of his trial, hoping of course that he, too, would be released and shortly follow Timothy in coming unto them, Phil. 2:23-24.
- C. Paul illustrated humble selflessness in the ministry of his co-worker, Epaphroditus, in Philippians 2:25-30:
 - a. Paul also added that he had thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus, his fellow brother, worker and soldier, and the messenger to the Philippians who had come to Paul to minister to him in prison, Phil. 2:25.
 - b. Epaphroditus had longed to return to the Philippian readers, and he was distressed upon hearing that they had heard he had been ill while ministering to Paul, Philippians 2:26.
 - c. Paul explained that not only had Epaphroditus been ill, but ill to the point of death, but that God had mercifully caused him to recover from his illness lest his death add sorrow to Paul, Philippians 2:27.
 - d. Accordingly, Paul expressed eagerness in wanting to send Epaphroditus back to his Philippian readers so they might rejoice upon seeing him again, and cause Paul less anxiety over the strain that was produced by the geographical distancing of Epaphroditus from the Philippians, Philippians 2:28.
 - e. Paul thus urged his readers to receive Epaphroditus with great joy, and to honor men like him, for he had nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life in illness to minister unto Paul's needs as a prisoner in representing the Philippians in their ministry unto Paul, Philippians 2:29-30.

Lesson: Paul gave three illustrations of humble selflessness in relating to fellow believers: (a) he illustrated it in his OWN willingness to be martyred for ministering for the Philippians that they might be saved and live humbly, selfless lives in relating to each other; (b) he illustrated it in Timothy's desire to seek Christ's interests in place of his own, humbly, selflessly serving Paul as a son helps his father and (c) he illustrated it Epaphroditus' work in humble selflessness to risk his life in dire illness to help Paul in behalf of the Philippians for the cause of Christ.

Application: May we believers be motivated by the examples of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus to live humbly selfless lives in relating to one another, to put the interests and cause of Christ before both our own interests and even before our own earthly lives as we relate to one another.