

### Christians Who Followed the Self-Giving Model of Christ

#### Philippians 2:17-24

Philippians 2:17-24: *“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. **18** For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me. **19** But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. **20** For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. **21** For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. **22** But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. **23** Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. **24** But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.”*

#### Background Notes

The letter to the Philippians is one of Paul’s “Prison Epistles.” The others are Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. All these epistles were written from Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, when he was under house arrest (Acts 28).

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians about ten years after the church was founded. The church at Philippi was founded on Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16), when Lydia and her household, and the Philippian jailer and his household were converted. “Household,” by the way, means more just the immediate family. The “household” included the servants as well. So that was the beginning of the church at Philippi.

Acts 16:40 may indicate that the Philippian church first met in the house of Lydia. When Paul and Silas were released from prison, *“they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”* Since that time Paul and his missionary team visited the church at Philippi more than once, on Paul’s third missionary journey. Sometime after those visits a problem that causing a rift arose in the church at Philippi. We don’t know what the problem was, but it was not a major doctrinal problem or Paul would have dealt with it in no uncertain terms in this epistle.

So it was either a minor doctrinal issue or a non-doctrinal matter, but as we all know, many times it’s the little things that cause a lack of unity in a church fellowship. Small disagreements can grow, and they can even split the church. In any case, throughout this epistle Paul urged the Philippians to come to unity.

In chapter 2 we have that great Christological passage about the self-giving attitude of our Lord Jesus, who gave up his rightful place in Heaven, came to this earth, took on humanity, lived a life of service, and died - even death on the cross - for us, so our sins could be forgiven. We often read those wonderful verses (5-11) without verses 1-4, but it’s important to

notice that this wonderful, Christ-exalting passage is in a very **practical** context! Verse 5: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”* In other words, this same self-giving mindset and attitude that was in Christ Jesus should also be in **you!** Then comes that great passage, describing the self-giving love of our Lord Jesus.

On the basis of the Philippians adopting a self-giving attitude, the apostle Paul moved on to tell them to “work out their own salvation” (v12). Not work for their “soul’s” salvation, but to work out a solution to the growing division in their fellowship.

In verses 17-24, Paul gave two examples of Christians who were following the self-giving pattern – the pattern that we all should follow: Paul and Timothy.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. A gracious concept of fellow believers tends toward unity.

Paul himself is an example of this truth. *“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me”* (v17-18).

Notice the concept that Paul had of the Philippian believers in relation to himself. He was a “drink offering” and they were the “sacrifice.”

What was a *drink offering*? Under the Old Testament sacrificial system, a drink offering was a cup of wine that was poured out over the regular sacrifice. It was considered a *sweet aroma* to the Lord (Numbers 15). But the important point here is that the drink offering was not the sacrifice – it was a small addition to the sacrifice. In other words, Paul viewed the Philippians as the bigger sacrifice, and he viewed himself as only the drink offering that was poured out in addition to their sacrifice.

What a gracious concept! If every believer had such a concept of themselves and others, there would be fewer problems of disunity in our churches and fellowships! Do you have a gracious concept of your fellow believers? Do you see yourself as the “greatest part of the sacrifice” to the Lord, and the other believers are “only the drink offering” on your big sacrifice? Or do you see yourself as the drink offering, and the other believers as the larger part of the sacrifice? A gracious concept of fellow believers tends toward unity.

Verse 3: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”* This verse doesn’t mean that everyone else in the church really is more important or more valuable to the church than you are. No. But the point is that we’re to think of them in that way! That’s what Paul did. His concept was

that he was only the small drink offering, and the Philippian believers were the larger sacrifice. That's the way we should view our fellow believers.

Notice that Paul did not hold this concept reluctantly or grudgingly. He rejoiced - he was glad – and he urged them to do the same (v17-18). What an exhortation for us! Do you want unity in your fellowship? A gracious concept of fellow believers tends toward unity.

## **2. A genuine concern for fellow believers tends toward unity.**

This truth is taught from the example of Timothy (v19-24). Remember, Timothy had been with Paul when the church at Philippi was founded, and Timothy had visited the church several times. Now Paul planned to send Timothy to Philippi once again. Verse 19: *“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.”* And verse 23: *“Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me.”*

Notice that Paul particularly wanted to know what the Philippians were doing about their problem of disunity, so he was sending Timothy to them. In fact, he told them that he himself hoped to follow Timothy when he was released from his prison situation (v24). If I were a Philippian believer who was involved in the division and disunity, that news would motivate to get my act together - knowing that Timothy, Paul's personal representative, was coming to Philippi, and that Paul would be coming a little later!

Notice what Paul said about Timothy: *“For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus”* (v20-21). Timothy had a genuine concern for his fellow believers at Philippi. Paul says that everyone else “seek their own” – they were “out for #1” – themselves. But not Timothy.

Timothy wasn't seeking fame or prestige, and he had a genuine concern for the believers at Philippi. No wonder Paul was sending Timothy to help settle this problem of disunity! Timothy and the Philippian believers not only knew each other, but Timothy also had a genuine concern for them. A genuine concern for fellow believers tends toward unity.

Do you have a genuine concern for your fellow believers? Or do you have just token interest? Here's a good test to see if you're genuinely concerned for your fellow believers: what do you do to serve others? You won't get top grades on this test if you only do things that others can see. Top grades come from serving your fellow believers in ways that people **can't see!**

For example, how much time do you spend in prayer for the people in your church or fellowship? If you spend a significant amount of time praying for your fellow believers (especially those who tend to rub you the wrong way!), then

there will be more unity in your fellowship! A genuine concern for fellow believers tends toward unity.

## Practical Applications

### 1. As “sacrifices,” let’s not call all the shots.

This passage teaches that we should view ourselves as “sacrifices” – and better yet, as the small drink offering that was poured out on the sacrifice. Now let me ask you, does a “sacrifice” push its weight around? Does a “sacrifice” manipulate others to get its own way? Does a “sacrifice” try to call all the shots? Of course not! It’s a sacrifice! It gives up all its rights and privileges!

So what about us? Do we push our weight around in the fellowship? Do we try to manipulate our fellow believers to get what we want? Do we like to call all the shots in church decisions? Do we grumble about the church leaders? If that’s true of you, then you don’t have a biblical concept of your real importance - and you can be sure that you will be a cause of disunity in your church or fellowship.

Remember - sacrifices don’t call all the shots!

### 2. As servants, let’s try to serve as children.

Look at what Paul said about Timothy: *“But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel” (v22).*

That’s quite a recommendation! I’m sure those of you have children can appreciate what Paul was saying here. When my sons were young, they loved to help me in home projects. They didn’t do it for pay, or for ulterior motives - they were my excited and enthusiastic and happy helpers!

Is that your attitude when you serve your fellow believers? Or are you a grouch? Maybe you only serve reluctantly - no excitement or enthusiasm. Or maybe you only serve if you’ll be paid - no true attitude of humbly serving others. It’s only a job for you.

Remember - we’re servants, and we should try to serve enthusiastically, like happy children!