
Church History

The Friendship of Paul and Timothy Pt.2

Dr. Michael Haykin

In the previous issue, (Issue 4.4) we noted that the apostle Paul is exhorting the Christians at Philippi to address their disunity and be “like minded.” Paul illustrated this with the example of Christ (Philippians 2).

After he has outlined the work and motivation of Christ, the Apostle continues the theme of thinking of others’ best interests. In Philippians 2:19-22 he gives a second example of being likeminded and having the interests of others at heart. This time he turns to his friend Timothy.

“Likeminded” (Philippians 2:20)

From the words and phrases that Paul uses in Philippians 2:19-22, it is clear that he is

recommending Timothy as an example of Christlikeness.

Unlike others that Paul knows, Timothy sincerely cares for the state of the Philippians. He is genuinely concerned about the needs of other believers and is not solely seeking to promote his own interests. He displays the mind of Christ. Paul describes him as “like minded.” Because of his desire to be like Christ, Timothy is one who fully shares Paul’s heart and mind and is thus a completely trustworthy companion and friend of Paul.

Due to their age difference, Paul naturally speaks of Timothy as his son. But he quickly adds that Timothy did not serve him, but together as equals before God, they served the Lord of the gospel, Christ. Paul is always very careful to avoid giving the impression that he is lord and master over the faith of others.

In this text from Philippians, we see clearly the way that Paul prizes his friendship with Timothy, and the way that it is based on a harmony of heart and mind. Without such harmony there can be no intimate friendship.

"Come before Winter" (2 Timothy 4:21)

The final record of this friendship is found in 2 Timothy. This letter was written weeks, perhaps a few months, before Paul's death by a Roman executioner. As he wrote Paul was in a cell in Rome, while Timothy was in Ephesus, on the coast of what today is modern Turkey. Paul opens the letter by describing Timothy as a "beloved son" whom he regularly remembers in prayer and whom he eagerly desires to see. As he thinks of Timothy, he especially recalls the last time that the two were together, when Timothy broke down and wept (2 Timothy 1:2-4). This occasion may well have been when Paul was arrested.

After encouraging Timothy to hold fast to the gospel, to pursue godliness, and to fulfill his ministry, Paul tells his friend of his impending death. He faces this prospect of death with confidence, aware that he is saved and stands in a right relationship with "the righteous judge" (2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1:9). But so strong is his friendship with Timothy that he no sooner mentions his death that he urges him to be "diligent to come to me quickly" (2 Timothy 4:9).

In fact, as he draws the letter to a close, he again urges his friend: "do your utmost to come before winter" (2 Timothy 4:21). During the winter months

from November to March it was dangerous to sail the Mediterranean Sea, and much of the shipping in that region halted for that reason. Aware of this fact and conscious that his death was close, Paul is urging Timothy to sail from Ephesus for Rome before the winter months. If he didn't, then he would have to travel overland to Rome, which would take considerably longer, and he might not arrive before Paul's death.