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Philippians 2:19-3:9

Discipleship 101: Two Great Disciples & One Garbage Disciple

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Have you ever gotten sucked into one of those **cheap magazine** or **buzzfeed quizzes** that tries to tell you something about yourself? You answer a dozen questions and it categorizes you as a certain type of person (introvert, extrovert, shy, outgoing, etc.) or as a character from one of your favorite movies or books.

I took a “**Which Harry Potter Character Are You**” quiz and got **Severus Snape**. Severus Snape is pretty much the bad guy for most of Harry Potter. The quiz said I’m cold, calculating, sarcastic, and am an emotional wreck on the inside. To balance it out, I took a **Lord of the Rings** quiz and got **Legolas**. I am calm, collected, a warrior, and love my friends. Be grateful if you’ve never taken one of these quizzes.

In our sermon series, we’re talking about disciples. Disciple means “learner” or “student” and in general we define a disciple at Cornerstone as **someone who follows Jesus**. That means someone who is seeking to love Jesus, learn his teachings, and put them into practice. But are there **different types** of disciples? If so, **what type** of disciple are you?

Paul, after he tells the church of Philippi how to live—humbly, unified, joyful—gives **three examples** of disciples, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself who are trying to put the teachings of Christ into practice. So as we look at them, we can **ask**, “Am I this type of disciple?” Let’s look at Timothy first.

Timothy: A disciple who serves (Phil 2:19-24)

Here are a few things we know about Timothy.

- We first meet Timothy on Paul’s **second missionary journey** in **Acts 16** at **Lystra**, which is southern **Asia Minor** in Bible times and **Turkey** in modern times.¹
- Timothy’s **grandmother** and **mother** were both Christians who raised him to **love the Lord** (2 Tim 1:5), but his father is a **Greek** and likely not a believer, so initially he wasn’t circumcised. **Circumcision** is a **medical procedure** the Jews performed on every male as a **sign** they (as a people) belonged to God.
- Timothy has a great **reputation** in the church, so Paul chooses him to join him on his journey. Because Paul wants to reach the Jews in the region, he **circumcises** Timothy.
- Timothy became a **church-planting Pastor**, helping assist Paul with much of his ministry. Paul wrote **1-2 Timothy** to him to explain how to organize and oversee **local churches** (*Cornerstone is a local church*).

Timothy is a disciple who has served Paul and the church for many years. Paul says this in v20-22, “I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.”

He serves others humbly.

¹ Cliff Kvidahl, “[Timothy](#),” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Remember how Paul opened the letter? By calling Timothy a servant. “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:1). Timothy has a **servant’s heart**. He **genuinely** cares about the other people in the church. Remember what Paul called for in chapter 2 verse 3?

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

As disciples, we’re also called to serve others **humbly**. Humble service can take the form of making a **meal** for a friend, volunteering at an **outreach** event, or using your **gifting** to serve the church, like in worship, finances, preaching, or elsewhere. We don’t serve to win “likes” but because we **genuinely care**.

He serves the gospel faithfully.

Timothy is humble because he’s serving Christ. Verses 21-22 says he puts the **interests** of **Jesus Christ** first and he serves with Paul in the work of the **gospel**. Timothy serves because he’s been touched by Christ and the gospel message. *The gospel is the good news that all who repent and believe in Jesus receive eternal life and a real relationship with God through Jesus.* Timothy is a disciple who serves Christ and the gospel humbly. Are you this kind of disciple? Do you want to be like Timothy?

Quiz - Are you a Timothy?

1. Do you show genuine concern for the welfare of others?
2. Do you serve others humbly, not looking for praise or reward?
3. Do you put Christ and the gospel message first in your life?
4. Do you love the local church and put the church’s needs before your own?

If you can **answer yes** to these questions, then you’re a **servant-disciple**. **Chances** are you can’t fully answer yes to any of these questions. But maybe you can see the **beginning of a yes** in some of them. That’s **great!** *You’re a disciple who serves, you’re becoming a Timothy.* But Paul doesn’t stop with Timothy.

Epaphroditus: A disciple who sacrifices (Phil 2:25-30)

The church at Philippi sent one of their own, Epaphroditus, to Paul to give him money to help **pay for his rent** under house arrest and to **keep him company** in what must have been a lonely time (Phil 4:18). This sacrifice came at steep **personal** cost to Epaphroditus.

He sacrifices his life (time, money, energy).

In **Romans 12:1**, Paul says, “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Epaphroditus is doing just that. Can you imagine all the things he must have sacrificed (**given to God**) to help Paul?

- Think of how much **time** it would have taken for him to travel from Philippi to Rome, which was a journey of between **700 to 1200 miles** depending on the route you took, lasting between **6 weeks to 3 months**.²
- Think of the **financial** cost. I doubt his **boss** gave him **leave**. He may have lost his job. It also cost the church financially as they paid to get him there, and send the money with him.

² Harmon, Matthew. Fridays in Philippians - Paul’s Circumstances <https://matthewsharmon.com/2012/10/05/fridays-in-philippians-pauls-circumstances/> Published October 5, 2012. Accessed October 26, 2017.

- Think of the cost to his **health** and **energy**. His journey could have been the thing that made him so sick he nearly died, perhaps from typhoid fever or malaria.³

When Paul says, “He risked his life to make up for the help yourselves could not give me” he’s not criticizing the Philippians. He’s simply pointing out that loving someone **long-distance** is different than loving someone up close. The whole church couldn’t come see Paul, but **one man** could, so they sent him.

Quiz - Are you an Epaphroditus?

1. Do you give up your time to care for others?
2. Do you give your money to help those in need, missions, and the ministry of the church?
3. Do you expend your energy to energize others?

If you can **answer yes** to these questions, then you’re an Epaphroditus. *If so, that’s wonderful, you’re a disciple who sacrifices.*

As I wrote my sermon, I wanted to illustrate someone who serves or sacrifices for the sake of another. Looking for a meaningful illustration led me to [PreachingToday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com). Out of all its **rich resources** it pointed me to... **Batman**, specifically Batman’s butler **Alfred**.

Alfred is Bruce Wayne’s (Batman’s) most **loyal servant**. When Bruce Wayne’s parents died, Alfred raised him, living in his home to take care of him 24/7. When Batman gets in fights, Alfred helps get him fixed. When Batman is out running around **Gotham**, Alfred is holding down the mansion. When Batman needs someone to talk to, Alfred is there. He does this without complaint because he **loves** Bruce and **believes** in the **mission**.⁴ *Alfred is the perfect self-sacrificing servant.*

The **problem** with Alfred is that he’s **not real**. None of us can ever be Alfred. None of us can be perfect and do it all. And as you look at Timothy and Epaphroditus, you may be thinking you could never be like them. The good news is that these are **real people** with **real faults**. Paul doesn’t highlight those faults but I think Paul recognizes his audience could be a bit discouraged by everything he’s telling them to do, so in Philippians chapter 3 Paul talks about **falling short** of what we know we should all be.

Paul: A disciple who is not good enough (Phil 3:1-9)

Paul transitions from highlighting and praising two disciples, to warning against a group of believers called the **Judaizers** who have a very simple message—the Philippians believers **aren’t good enough**. They’re not keeping the **Jewish law** in addition to believing in Jesus. Remember how Paul circumcised Timothy to not offend the local Jewish people? These people would have said, “You have to **circumcise** Timothy for him to become a Christian.” They could even point to the **Old Testament** to prove their point.

Deuteronomy 6:25 And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.’

This passage seems to say, “If I obey God’s laws, like being circumcised, then I’ll be **righteous**—that means I’ll be **acceptable** to God.” What’s this message today? If you’re a **good person**, God will accept you. If your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, God will accept you. If you donate to **charity**, drive a **hybrid**,

³ NIV Zondervan *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture*. Philippians 2:26 footnote. Page 2075.

⁴ *Batman’s Loyal Friend and Servant, Alfred* (<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/september/7091514.html>). Copyright Christianity Today (2014), accessed 10/26/17.

have **straight-A** kids, **don't cheat** on your spouse, and are a **spiritual** person, God will accept you. In other words, you can **achieve** your own **righteousness** before God. Did you know those are **lies**?

Romans 8:7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

This means you and I, **apart** from the Holy Spirit, **can't obey** God. Our hearts and minds won't let us. We can't make ourselves acceptable to him. This is why Paul has **this to say** about those who teach what we call **works-righteousness** (aka. I can achieve acceptance with God through my own good deeds).

"Warning! Beware of Dogs!"

In **Philippians 3:2**, Paul warns, "Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh." Paul is calling them dogs! Not cute cuddly puppies, but **vicious dogs**. Trusting in your **own good works** to earn God's love will one day **bite you**. One day you'll face God, and it won't be enough.

It's not **works** that **make us acceptable** before God but God himself through the **Holy Spirit**. Verse 3 says "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—" What does Paul mean "we are the circumcision?" Does he mean non-circumcised believers in Philippi are somehow circumcised before God? **Yes**.

Romans 2:29a No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code...

Anyone who **repents** of their sins and puts their **faith** in Christ has been **circumcised spiritually**. In other words, when you believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit does **surgery** on your **heart**. God **gives** you a new heart (through faith in Jesus) that makes you **acceptable** to God.

Paul was great, but he wasn't good enough.

Paul had the right background, went to the right school, studied the Scriptures oh so carefully as a Pharisee, and did the right things for his synagogue, but it wasn't enough.

Philippians 3:5-6 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

This is Paul's spiritual **resumé**. It's pretty impressive. Do you have a **resumé**, a list of good deeds you're counting on to please God? Do you think of moments you've done good things that nobody else knows about, and are you relying on them? Paul was great, but even he wasn't good enough.

Philippians 3:7-9 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

What does Paul do with all his good works? He **throws them away**. He doesn't rely on them. They're all **garbage** in comparison to **knowing Jesus** and receiving his **acceptance** by God as a gift.

Quiz - Are you a Paul?

1. Do you realize that no matter how hard you try, it's not enough?

2. Do you want to give up trying to earn God's acceptance and receive it as a gift through Christ Jesus?
3. Do you believe that *in Christ, you're good enough*?

That's right! In Christ, you're good enough. We can spend all our years trying to be good enough or we can receive Christ's righteousness as a **gift**, and become good enough through him. It's as we **realize** that we are good enough in Christ that we can **begin** to look more like Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul, more humble, more unified, more joyful, more like *self-sacrificing servant disciples*.

In Christ, you're good enough.

I want to invite our **musician** up to begin **playing** as we reflect on this. Have you been depending on your own good works to earn God's love and acceptance? Paul has a word for that, "garbage." What do you do with the **garbage** in your **house**? You **throw it away**.

I want to ask my **helper** to bring in the trash can now and place it front and center. Like Paul, we all have things that we're trusting in for our righteousness that we need to throw out. Things we think make us **good people** but actually help us trust in ourselves instead of God.

- Like Paul was the perfect **Israelite**, I grew up in a **Christian family**. I've brought a picture of my family today. If part of me believes that I earn God's love because I'm either a part of a good Christian family or am creating a good Christian family, what should I do with this picture? **Throw it away.**
- Like Paul was a **Pharisee** who knew how to study Scripture, I went to seminary to get a **Master of Divinity**. You can tell my M.Div is **important** because it's in such a **large frame**. If part of me believes this degree, or my **ordination**, or being your **pastor**, or reading my **Bible**, or **praying**, or coming to **church** earns God's acceptance, what should I do? **Throw it away.**
- Like Paul was **zealous** for his **mission** as he persecuted the church, I am zealous for our mission to reach Westford with the gospel. Here's a copy of this week's Westford Eagle. If part of me believes reaching my **frontline** or **growing** our church earns God's love, what should I do? **Throw it away.**

What are you depending on to **earn God's love**? What are you **counting on** for your acceptance before God? When you feel bad, what do you remember to make yourself feel better? Christ? Or something else? I want you to write whatever that something else is on the **index card** my **helpers** are passing out.

Take the next **2-3 minutes** as the music plays to identify in your heart what you're counting on to be **good enough** before God. Write it down, and when you're ready, come up front and throw it away. The gospel is the good news Christ not only takes away our sins, he gives us his **acceptance** before God. So when you come up and have **thrown away your self-righteousness** in the garbage, I will **give you** a printed copy of **Philippians 3:7-9** to remind you that *in Christ, you're good enough*.

*Let me **pray** to prepare our hearts, and then **come** as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).