



## Epaphroditus: Brother, Worker, and Solider

***But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. [Phil 2:25-30](#)***

In the preceding verses, Paul encouraged the Philippians that he hoped to send Timothy, his co-worker in the gospel, to them soon. We saw the importance of Timothy's role as an evangelist in serving the apostle Paul and church at large with a humble and willing heart.

In a continuation of the same thought, Paul mentions another fellow worker for Christ, Epaphroditus. Named after the Greek goddess Aphroditē, he was clearly a Gentile convert to Christianity. Imagine being saved and yet still carrying the name of the mythical god of lust and passion. I'm sure he had some interesting challenges as he served in the church! But again we see the importance of humbly serving others in whatever capacity and circumstance the Lord has placed us in.

Epaphroditus is only mentioned by name here in Philippians, and in addressing this church Paul says that he ***"is also your messenger and minister to my need."*** The word rendered ***messenger*** is the Greek [apostolos](#), or more appropriately, *apostle*, but as there is no clear Scripture supporting Epaphroditus met the strict definition of an apostle of Christ (cf: [Acts 1:21-22](#)) or that he literally met the risen Christ as Paul did ([Acts 9:5](#)), we can surmise Paul was referring to *"one who is sent out with orders,"* the other definition of this distinctive word. This aligns nicely with the context of this letter, as Epaphroditus came to Paul from Philippi with a generous gift from the church (see [Phil 4:18](#)), and was personally loved by these believers as we see that they were ***"distressed because [they] had heard that he was sick."***

Paul's concern and love for Epaphroditus is also evident in that he says, ***"but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow."*** Perhaps you think of Paul and other early-church founders as having hearts and heads of steel, only concerned with the task of getting the gospel to the world. But no, they had emotions, feelings, and fears just like we all do. Losing Epaphroditus would have caused Paul great pain, not just in the work of the Lord, but also personally (***sorrow upon sorrow***). So if you're ever



tempted to think these men weren't human, verses like these remind us that they were just like you and me in many ways and experienced much of the same emotions and struggles we do.

Paul says that he is sending Epaphroditus so that the Philippians ***“may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.”*** Once again Paul's pastoral heart shines through as his love and concern for these believers is clearly displayed. Even if his ***brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier*** could have remained there to help him while he was in a Roman prison, he felt it much better to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippian church for their joy, and in doing so, Paul knew they would be good in hands and he would not have to be so concerned for them. True Christian love is always sacrificial and exhibited in a way where we put other's needs above our own.

In closing, he instructs the Philippians to ***“receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.”*** Perhaps a simple reminder, or more likely an exhortation to do better, Paul's words are a powerful demonstration of the necessity for believers not to sit on their hands when there is a need to fill. Christianity is not something we can “do” passively. It is all-encompassing and should embody every aspect of our life.

If the Lord instructs us to do something, to help someone, or to give up something, and we chose not to, it is sin and there are consequences. And here we can see that whatever ***deficiency*** Paul is referring to was an area of weakness or an opportunity for growth in their service and walk. Because the Philippians had not served with all their hearts, Epaphroditus had to step in, and it nearly killed him. Imagine the guilt the Philippians would have carried if Epaphroditus had died due to their lacking service to Paul? We aren't given many details, but a good takeaway is that we can't just count on others to do it all. If God calls us to do something, we must do it, otherwise the ripple effect impacts the lives of others, sometimes dramatically.

Is there something the Lord has asked you to do today that you are not doing? It could be something big or small, but if you know you are to be doing that, then you best get to it. Someone very well may be depending on you obeying the command of the Lord.

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece

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