



PHILIPPIANS

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Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; Philippians 2:25

Paul has noted that he would send Timothy when the time was right to carry the message about his status to the churches. Before that time, and probably also carrying this epistle back to them, he was sending Epaphroditus. The name is often associated with Epaphras who is mentioned in Colossians and Philemon, but this is not likely. Epaphras was a shortened form of the name, but it was also a very common name. Based on the context of those passages, the two are probably not the same person. Whether the same or not, however, the name is derived from Aphrodite, or Venus. It means "Charming."

This Epaphroditus was being sent back by necessity which will be explained in the coming verses. For now, we are just given the following three descriptions of him. He was, according to Paul –

- 1) My brother. This is not to be taken literally, but as a brother in Christ. It is an affectionate term which is still commonly shared among believers today.
- 2) Fellow worker. He obviously worked alongside Paul as will be seen, especially in verse 30. They may have worked together in Philippi, or it may be that he was simply sent to work with Paul while he was imprisoned. Either way, he is given the credit for being a fellow worker with him.
- 3) Fellow soldier. This is not the only time that Christians are considered as soldiers, carrying out military style work. Paul notes the same idea in Philemon 1:2, and in 2 Timothy 2:3, 4. Further, Paul notes that we are in a spiritual battle in Ephesians 6:10-20.

If we are in a battle, we are then soldiers. These and other examples confirm and explain the term.

Next he says about Epaphroditus, "...but your messenger." He labored with Paul, but he was sent from Philippi to do so. The word used is *apostolos*, and it is the same word used to speak of the designated apostles of Christ. Care needs to be taken with this word. The term simply means a messenger, or "someone sent." In the case of Epaphroditus, he was sent by the church at Philippi, and thus he is an apostle of Philippi. The term is not to then be carried over to mean that he is an apostle of Christ.

Christ sent certain men who are known as His apostles. Others sent certain men who are known as their apostles. There are no "apostles" of Christ today who carry the authority of Christ. A church can send someone and call him an apostle, but there is no need for such a title. Whatever word is common to that church's language would be better suited than confusing the term "apostle" with that found in the Bible when speaking of the "apostles" or "sent ones" of Jesus.

Such titles are unnecessary and often only lead to a false impression of the status and authority of the person given that title. The "apostolic era" ended with the death of the last apostle who was given that title by Christ. They had to meet certain criteria which are laid out elsewhere in Scripture, chief among which is having personally seen the Lord Jesus and been directly commissioned by him.

Having said this, Epaphroditus is called "your messenger and the one who ministered to my need." He was the messenger from Philippi to Paul, and he was the minister of Philippi to tend to Paul's need.

Life application: Use caution not to be swayed by fancy titles which people either grant, or which they may even claim for themselves. In the church, there are designated positions, and there are people which fill those positions, but high and lofty titles often produce unhealthy levels of adoration. We are to adore Christ alone. Pastors, preachers, missionaries, priests, bishops, deacons, popes, elders, etc. are all just folks who are not to be elevated above others, with the noted exceptions found in Scripture concerning granting certain workers "double honor" (See 1 Timothy 5:17). But this honor is for the work they do, not for who they are as individuals.

...since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. Philippians 2:26

Speaking of Epaphroditus, Paul now notes two reasons why he is sending him back to Philippi. The first is “since he was longing for you all.” There is a strong emphasis in these words which shows that he was truly homesick. He longed and continually longed to be with them.

Secondly, he “was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.” This second reason probably only exacerbated the longing of the first. It had been reported to them that he was sick. As we will see in the next verse, it wasn’t just something simple like a cold, but something life-threatening. Without a second report (which is now being written by Paul) their emotions would run high. This caused his to run high as well. Because of these things, Paul was determined that sending him home was the right thing to do.

Think over what is being said here, and what will be said in the next verse carefully. See if you can contemplate why these words of Paul are so relevant to Christianity today? What is it about them that shouts out “Doctrine matters?” In the next verse, the answer will be made clear.

Life application: Often, what is left undone or unspoken is as important to doctrine as what is actually recorded. Pay attention to such things and then evaluate them in connection to how various churches act, and what they claim Scripture is telling us. In so doing, you can cut out a lot of unnecessary fat from your Christian diet.

For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Philippians 2:27

Speaking of Epaphroditus still, Paul notes that “he was sick almost unto death.” Whatever affliction he had, it was so severe that those around him had all but given him up for dead. It is a striking comment coming from an apostle, isn’t it. Paul, like the other apostles, had healed many. Both he and Peter had called the dead to life by the power of Christ, and yet there is no hint of this in him now. Instead, he had been unable to heal him as is evidenced by the later words of this verse.

Epaphroditus had a life-threatening affliction, but good news came when “God had mercy on him.” He was, in fact, restored to health by the providence of God. Whatever afflicted him took its course and he was finally restored to vigor. Paul then notes that this mercy extended not only to him, “but on me also.”

The tenderness of the words shows his love for both Epaphroditus and those in Philippi. His heart would have been broken over the death of the beloved brother and in his inability to restore him to them. Should that not have been the case, Paul says, “...lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.”

From this statement, it is evident that Paul had nothing to do with the healing. If he could have gone up and claimed healing over Epaphroditus, these words could not be included in the letter. Further, they add a touch of confirmation that this letter is genuine and not written by any other than Paul. Otherwise, a miraculous healing would have been noted. The use of the accusative in this verse gives the sense of motion. "Sorrow upon sorrow" mentally provides the image of wave after wave of sorrow coming upon him.

The importance of this verse, and several others in the New Testament (such as Paul's telling Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach problems, and etc.) demonstrate as clearly as can be seen, that the healing claims of the Charismatic movement are to be rejected as false. It is God who heals, not false teachers who wave their hands over others and supposedly restore them to health. Their deceitfulness is an affront to the truth of God which is found in Scripture. Even the apostles only healed on certain occasions, and only in order to substantiate their apostolic authority. These gifts ended with the termination of the apostolic age.

Now, Christians are to pray for healing of others, but are never to act in a presumptuous and sinful manner by claiming healing. Such notions are to be rejected by those who hold faithfully to God's word, and to the notion of God's sovereignty over all things, including the affliction of his people.

Life application: Doctrine matters.

Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Philippians 2:28

"Therefore" connects the dots of the previous verses concerning Epaphroditus. Verse 25 spoke of Paul's necessity in sending him back. This was then explained in the next two verses. Now, he sums that up by saying, "I sent him the more eagerly." It can be inferred that he didn't want to send him at all, but because of the sickness, he sent him back, and even with eagerness. What was right and fitting was this course of action.

To explain it, he then says, "...that when you see him again, you may rejoice." These words follow from verse 26 which said that he "was distressed because you had heard that he was sick." Epaphroditus' distress was increased because of their worry for him. Neither he nor Paul wanted that, and so he was going to back to Philippi to give them a chance to rejoice. However, there is a note of sadness which follows from this. Paul says that "I may be less sorrowful."

Being less of something implies that the thing still exists. He has been talking about rejoicing, even in his imprisonment, but that rejoicing does not cancel out his sorrows. Instead, they are

separate boxes which he had packaged up. The rejoicing was in the spirit and in the hope of Christ; the sadness was in the flesh and in the loss of his much needed help in the return of Epaphroditus. The words then are reminiscent of his note in 2 Corinthians 6:10 which say, “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

Life application: There is nothing wrong with being a Christian and being sorrowful. We are human beings with human limitations. We should always, and in all situations, rejoice in Christ and in the hope that He has our difficulties all safely guarded in His capable hands. And yet, we can also express the human emotions and frailties that God has instilled in us. There is nothing dishonoring of God in this. He created us to express ourselves in a godly manner in each of our emotional and spiritual states.

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;

Philippians 2:29

There is a hint of near concern here in Paul’s words. He is sending Epaphroditus back after a great sickness that almost led to death. Using this as an opportunity to obtain favor for him, he says, “Receive him therefore in the Lord.” The “therefore” is what gives us a hint that he may not have been received back as he should have been otherwise.

What may be the case, but which is left unstated, is that the divisions in the church could have had some agreeing with the sending of Epaphroditus, while others not having agreed to it. Solely as a means of example, we could guess that he was too young in the faith for some to think sending him was a good idea. However, now that Paul has spoken so highly of him, and with his service almost ending in death, he is asking for him to be received with honor. Whatever the true reason for his words, he is asking that his return to them be “with all gladness.”

If there were divisions about him, they should be dropped. He has faithfully served, and he has been willing to expend himself in the service he was called to. Nothing was lacking in his performance and, therefore, he should be welcomed home heartily. Further, Paul notes that the church is to “hold such men in esteem.”

In the Bible, we are to give honor where honor is due. In the case of Epaphroditus, it was certainly due. He was to be given the honor of a true and faithful soul who has carried out his duties in a way which was worthy of note.

Life application: Whatever task we have been assigned, or to which we volunteer, we should do it as unto the Lord, not expecting anything from our work except the honor of pleasing Him. However, we are to honor those who perform their duties well, remembering that they need

encouragement as all people do. In honoring others, they will hopefully be willing to honor our notable deeds as well.

...because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me. Philippians 2:30

There are several variations in Greek texts which are argued among scholars. Determining which is the correct and original is important, but apparently no variation is of great weight, and does not change the overall intent of the words.

The words, "...because for the work of Christ he came close to death" are still talking about Epaphroditus. His efforts in his duties probably wore him down physically to the point where he was without the ability to ward off sickness. It shows the mental determination of a person who was willing to put the needs of Paul, and the work of Christ, ahead of his own personal well-being. In this determined state, Paul says that he was "not regarding his own life."

The correct Greek wording is argued here, but Vincent's Word Studies notes that his choice of the original indicates "to venture, to expose one's self. It was also a gambler's word, to throw down a stake. Hence Paul says that Epaphroditus recklessly exposed his life." The Greek word was used as a descriptor in the early church for those who took care of the sick at the risk of their own lives. Thus they were the "reckless people."

Epaphroditus was so engaged in his duties that he fell into this category. And this was, according to Paul, "to supply what was lacking in your service toward me." The wording in the English almost makes it sound like a reproach, but Greek scholars ensure us that the Greek carries no such implication. Rather, it was simply that he filled up a need which could not be filled up otherwise. Rather than a rebuke, it is a compliment. He was sent by them to fill this need, and the need was then met.

Life application: We have one shot at this life. Should we stay in bed and get a bit more sleep? Should we go see one more movie instead of dedicating that time to the Lord? In the end, we all need a break from our labors, but the more frivolous activities we engage in, the less we are doing for His glory. Each of us should be willing to say, "Use me up now Lord. This one life is for You."