

## Philippians 2:25-30 - Epaphroditus - Brother, Worker, Soldier, and Life-Risker for the Work of Christ

**Introduction:** Last week we looked at Paul's commendation of his "kindred spirit," Timothy - a man who genuinely cared for the well-being of the Philippian congregation - a man who sought the interests of Jesus Christ and not his own.

**In our passage here**, we will see another great man, Epaphroditus, described by Paul as a brother, worker, soldier, and life-risker for the work of Christ. And in addition to these things, he was a true *model* of a pastor. There was a depth to his love for the people in his church that was uncommon and heart-warming - as we will see clearly in this passage. In this sermon I want to focus upon the descriptors used by Paul to identify Epaphroditus - brother, worker, soldier, life-risker, as well as his pastor's heart for the people.

**Application:** Looking carefully at passages like this one and seeing how certain individuals are praised and what they are praised for is a great exercise. We are encouraged throughout Scripture to consider, remember, and imitate godly people.

**Hebrews 13:7** Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

**Hebrews 6:10-12** For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. [11] And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**Epaphroditus** - whose name means "lovely," along with **Timothy**, was such an individual. Let us now consider who he was and what was praiseworthy in his conduct and worthy of our imitation:

1. **Epaphroditus' Longing for the Philippians** - v25-26;
2. **Epaphroditus' Sickness** - V27-28;
3. **Epaphroditus' Homecoming to Philippi** - V29-30

### 1. Epaphroditus' Longing for the Philippians - v25-26

**[25] 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;**

⇒ **brother** - brotherhood is a major NT theme. Because all of God's people are *adopted*, they are spiritual *siblings*. All Christians are brothers and sisters to one another.

**Illustration:** Jesus Himself taught us that he regarded as His own family those who did the will of His Father and were truly His disciples -

**Matthew 12:46-50** While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. [47] Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." [48] But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" [49] And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! [50] For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

**Epaphroditus** was a brother in Christ to Paul and to the Philippian church.

⇒ **fellow worker** - Ministry is work - and Paul was thankful to have a "fellow worker" like Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus was a minister to the church at Philippi. When the Scriptures speak of the "work of ministry," what is it referring to? The work of ministry involves *a lot of different duties*: **BOCO 8:3 of elders**:

It belongs to those in the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto. They should

visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock.

**BOCO 8:5 - of teaching elders:**

When a man is called to labor as a teaching elder, it belongs to his order, in addition to those functions he shares with all other elders, to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed ambassador. As he bears glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing, he is termed evangelist. As he stands to proclaim the Gospel, he is termed preacher. As he dispenses the manifold grace of God, and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed steward of the mysteries of God.

**These were the things that took up Epaphroditus' time. These are very serious and important duties:** They require a tremendous amount of thought and attention - *pray for the officers of the church*. Pray that God would help them perform these duties with excellence.

⇒ **soldier** - In Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy, he uses a number of metaphors to describe the work of ministry in which Timothy, and in our passage here, Epaphroditus also, was engaged in:

**2 Tim. 2:3-6, 10** You therefore must endure hardship as **a good soldier of Jesus Christ**. [4] No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. [5] And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. [6] The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops. ... [10] Therefore **endure all things for the sake of the elect**, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

\* **Being a soldier** implies war, which implies danger, which implies risk.

\* **The nature of the conflict** of the war in which we fight is not only with the sinful corruptions coming at us from all directions in a godless culture - but also our own proneness to laziness, neglect, and selfishness. We must "endure all things" for the sake of the elect.

⇒ **messenger** - the Greek term translated here as "messenger" is actually *apostolos* - the word for "apostle." But here it means 'messenger' - one sent by the Philippians to Paul in prison to minister to Paul's needs.

⇒ **minister to my needs** - Paul mentions that he had received the Philippian church's gift in: **Philip. 4:18** Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

**[26] because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.**

**Point:** Paul thought it was necessary to *send* Epaphroditus back to the Philippians because he was "distressed" that they had heard he was sick.

⇒ Notice here another example of selflessness. Epaphroditus is "distressed" - *ademoneo* - the only other place this verb is used in Scripture is in Matthew's and in Mark's account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he "began to be sorrowful and **deeply distressed.**"

**Application:** This man was "deeply distressed" that his congregation had *heard* he was sick. He knew their love for him was so deep that they would be distraught if they thought something bad had happened to him. And so - look at v26 again - why did Paul send Epaphroditus back to the Philippian church? *Because Epaphroditus "was longing" for them "and was distressed because" they "had heard that he was sick."*

## 2. Epaphroditus' Sickness - V27-28

**[27] 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.**

**Point:** We don't know what was wrong with Epaphroditus - but life in general at this time was much more *medically* dangerous. We live in a time of incredible medical technology in terms of what we have vaccines and treatments for.

**Illustration:** Just over a hundred years ago, J.C. Ryle sternly warned young men of the reality of judgment and how quickly they may find themselves there because of illness.

**Point 2:** God spared Epaphroditus' life - but notice from the text: "*he was sick to the point of death.*" This man *almost* died of whatever this illness was.

### **God and difficult times - dark providences (a Puritan mode of expression)**

**Application:** God not only numbers the days we will live, but He also determines how those days will play out. Many great men and women of God suffered from poor health or physical pain - sometimes without a rest.

**Illustration:** John Calvin suffered nearly all of his life from poor health and almost constant migraine headaches. He also had terrible kidney stones. Just to give you an idea of what medical technology was like in the 1500s in Geneva, Calvin's "doctor" - as a way of treating his kidney stones - encouraged him to go horseback riding. And Calvin's response to him was: "I would, but my hemorrhoids are so bad I could never get on the horse."

**Application:** Whether it is a very well-loved, important minister in a brand new church who is sick to the point of death, or any other dark providence we might experience - we as believers must always take heart that the sovereign God who loves us so much that He sent His Son to accomplish and secure our eternal salvation, has a purpose in the dark times He takes us through - and that this purpose is always "good."

**Romans 8:28-30** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. [29] For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. [30] Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

**Application 2:** It is critical for us as believers to understand the great truth that there is a world difference in the *reasons* for which God brings suffering to us and the *reasons* for which He brings suffering to the life of an unbeliever. **[eventually, I'd like to do a multi-part sermon series on this].**

⇒ when God brings suffering to the life of an unbeliever, it is because God is warning them so that they might be brought to repentance, or He is beginning their eternal judgment *now*.

⇒ when God brings suffering to the life of a believer - like this very serious illness which almost took Epaphroditus' life - He is refining their faith to make it stronger, He is disciplining them, He is teaching them to pray, or He is driving them to find comfort in His Word!

**Application 3:** It is only the Christian who can do as **James 1:2-4** says: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. [4] But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

**[28] 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.**

**Point:** Paul knows how overjoyed the Philippian church would be to see their pastor well. They had heard he was very sick and were no doubt *very worried* about him. The Philippian congregation sent Epaphroditus to Paul in prison with a special gift to minister to his needs. And how they've heard that their dear minister is very sick - to the point of death. Having recovered from this illness, Epaphroditus is now "longing for them" - he wants them to stop worrying and he wants to rejoice with them that he will continue living with them. **It filled his heart with longing**

***just knowing that they were worried about his health.***

**Application:** Imagine how overjoyed this church would have been to see Epaphroditus coming to them again - how much happiness there would have been among them when they were at last reunited with him. I hope and pray that the love we will all grow in for one another will be a parallel to this very kind of thing. I hope and pray that we will learn to love one another deeply - to count and depend on one another's prayer, love fellowship, and kindness - and to have affection for one another - all your elders, deacons, and me together.

### **3. Epaphroditus' Homecoming to Philippi - V29-30**

***[29] Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; [30] because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.***

**Point:** Because faithful ministers who care so deeply for the people in their church are, as Paul laments, very few and far between, we must hold such individuals in high regard.

**Notice v30 again...** "...he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life..."

**WSC 67** Which is the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.

**WSC 68** What is required in the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

**WSC 69** What is forbidden in the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto."

**Application:** And yet, in this text, we are told that Epaphroditus was willing to "risk his life" or the work of Christ. In fact, he came "close to death for the work of Christ." Paul *praises* this man for doing so - and encourages the congregation at Philippi to hold this man in high regard *because he came close to death and risked his own life*. This raises a very important question for our consideration. Obviously, Epaphroditus' willingness to disregard his own life in this situation was not sinful. When, if ever, is it ok to risk your own life?

**Which is more important? Human life, or obedience to God? Clearly, the biblical answer is: obedience to God.**

**Acts 20:22-24** And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, [23] except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. [24] But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

**Early Christian martyrs** - They were willing to die rather than commit a single, seemingly small act of disobedience by saying the words "kurios kaisar," "Caesar is Lord," followed by pinching a small bit of incense as an act of worship.

⇒ When Satan whispers in your ear that something you *know* is a sin is really "not that big a deal" - remember the precious Christian people who willingly laid down their lives rather than commit even one known act of disobedience to God.

**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego** were willing to lose their lives rather than bow before an image in Babylon.

***Obedience to God and our duty to God supersedes our own lives.***

We have seen here another profile of a very godly churchman - Epaphroditus. He was a dear brother in the Lord, a faithful worker, a fellow soldier in the battle for people's souls and against the godless world, and was a life-risker for the work of Christ. He did not seek his own but rather the things of Jesus Christ.

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## **Benediction**