



## World Christian Fellowship

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### Philippians 24 Role Model of Leaders/Servants – Epaphroditus

**Philippians 2:25-30**, *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; <sup>26</sup>since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. <sup>29</sup>Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; <sup>30</sup>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.*

There are few Pauls, there are some Timothy's, and there are many Epaphroditus.

This is the people's model.

- We don't know anything about Epaphroditus.
- We don't know anything about his background directly.
- We don't know anything about his parents.
- We don't know how long he had been a Christian.
- We don't know what his function was in the church.
- We really don't know anything except by implication in this passage.

We will try to construct the best we can somewhat of a profile of this very unique man.

Paul is a prisoner, a two-year imprisonment in a private house by the Roman government. The Romans have chained him to one of their soldiers.

During this imprisonment he still has some freedom for ministry. The Philippian church who loved him very deeply. When they aware of his situation were greatly troubled by it and decided they wanted to help him. Realizing he could no longer work to earn his living, support himself in his ministry, they wanted to send him some money.

So, the Philippians collected sacrificially from their people a gift of love and they sent it to Paul, and it was taken by this man Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus took the money to Paul. The Philippian church instructed him not only to deliver the money but to stay and to

become the servant of Paul in the matter of all his personal needs.

1. Philippian church would never have sent a man to work in proximity with the Apostle Paul unless he was most eminently representative of the godliness of that congregation.

We can be certain that Epaphroditus was a man of genuine spiritual virtue, a man of depth in terms of his love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. We could also ascertain that he was a man with a heart of a servant. For him to go and to simply meet all the needs of the Apostle Paul would indicate that he saw himself in the role of coming alongside to serve.

It could be that he was more likely a deacon or an elder and that his role was more the role of serving than the role of leading.

3. We can ascertain that he was a man of great courage because he knew exactly what he was walking into. There was no question in his mind how the Roman government felt about Paul.

If Paul's life was taken away, it would probably be a matter of time for them to consider taking the lives of those who served alongside of him.

So, here is a man Epaphroditus,

- ✓ is a godly man or he wouldn't have been chosen,
- ✓ is a servant who is chosen to do that which most fits his gifts,
- ✓ has the courage to step into a hostile environment where the very one he serves is hated, rejected.

There is a short form of the name Epaphroditus in the Greek and that is Epaphras.

Epaphras mentioned in Colossians 1:7 but there is no reason to identify the two as one.

The name Epaphroditus was a common name. In fact, the word Epaphroditus was a common word.

Not just a name but a common term.

The name is drawn from the name of a Greek god, Aphrodite. Aphrodite was the goddess of love. In Rome her name was Venus, goddess of love. Among the Greeks it was Aphrodite. She was the goddess of love and beauty.

The Epaphroditus is simply a term that means "favourite of Aphrodite."

This shows us that he came out of a pagan environment. Christians would never name a child like this.

We don't know when he was converted. It's very likely his family worshiped among other deities, this goddess Aphrodite. So, the man came out of a pagan background, converted to Christ. We don't know where, when and how.

It is possible he could have heard the Gospel when Paul founded the church at Philippi. He could have been one of the early converts and been there from the very beginning, but we do not know that.

He has become, however, a key Christian in the church, a sacrificial man who has left his

- ✓ home,
- ✓ employment,
- ✓ ministry,
- ✓ church,
- ✓ friends,
- ✓ wife,
- ✓ children and
- ✓ serve Paul.

A very sacrificial man.

**V 25**, *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;*

Paul gives to Epaphroditus five titles.

Three of them Epaphroditus in relation to Paul.

Two of them look at him in relation to the Philippian church.

1. My Brother
2. My Fellow Worker
3. My fellow Soldier

Paul is really honouring Epaphroditus as a faithful servant.

1. My brother."

**V 25**, *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;*

The key is the word "my."

Paul is viewing him in a very personal way. He is my brother. By spiritual birth they are brothers.

They both have the common source of life; God the Father having given them life in Christ through the Spirit. They are brothers in Christ and so they share the common eternal life.

It is not only brother of common life, but it is brother of common love.

Paul is saying that not only he shares with me common life, but he is a brother loved.

That's the personal titling. Paul is celebrating his own interpersonal relationship with him.

## **2. My Fellow Worker**

*V 25, 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;*

This title is how he related to the ministry.

This word is used thirteen times in the New Testament, twelve times out of the thirteen by Paul and he uses it of people who worked alongside him in the ministry.

**Romans 16,**

**1 Corinthians 1,**

**Philippians 4:3,**

**1 Thessalonians 3:2.**

Paul titles people "fellow worker," who came alongside and worked with him in the extension of the gospel.

Paul says that he not only in relation to my person is brother, but in relation to my task is fellow worker, co-worker.

The emphasis here is not on common life, but on common effort.

### **3. My Fellow Soldier**

*V 25, 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;*

This is not particularly looking at his relation to Paul or his relation to the task at hand, but that he is commendable in relationship to the enemies which fight against the ministry.

They have common enemy.

The title fellow soldier is a very honourable title.

My fellow leader in the matter of spiritual warfare.

This is very important title because it indicates that there was conflict in the ministry of Epaphroditus. It indicates that while Paul was battling, so was he. Anyone who came alongside him in that environment certainly was battling. Epaphroditus was probably battling not only men but demons, not only the earthly enemy but the heavenly enemy, not only the fleshly but the spiritual dimension.

Now all three of these terms demonstrate the Commitment and character of Epaphroditus and gracious humility of the heart of Paul.

This is the humble heart of the great Apostle.

Epaphroditus,

- ✓ unique man,
- ✓ godly man,
- ✓ servant at heart,
- ✓ courageous man,
- ✓ loved by Paul as a brother,
- ✓ Co-worker of Paul
- ✓ Fellow Soldier.

There are two more titles were given that they are in relation to the Philippian church.

#### **4. Your messenger**

**V 25**, *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;*

He is your messenger and minister to my need.

Your messenger is the word '*apostolos*' from which we get the word apostle, which isn't a translation but literally a transliteration.

Does this mean he was like the Twelve? Or like Paul? I

The Twelve Apostles are unique. The Twelve Apostles, and you must understand this distinction, are Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Galatians 1:1**, *"Paul, an Apostle, not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father."*

Now noted, there are some Apostles, only a few, eleven plus Matthias, plus Paul, only those men were Apostles selected by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and sent.

He does not say of Epaphroditus he is the Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ; he says he is your apostle.

The simple distinction.

The Apostles with the upper-case letters were those sent by Christ.

The apostles with the lower-case letters were those sent by the church.

He is not an Apostle of Christ; he is an apostle of the church.

He is not that uniquely called and dispatched, and foundational Apostle chosen by Christ; he is that apostle sent from the church chosen by the church.

## 5. Your minister to my need.

**V 25**, *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;*

He brought him money. There must have been a message with it, a message of love and the promise of prayers and all of that. He is your minister to my need.

Now the word for minister.

The word is '**leitourgon**' from which we get liturgy.

This word has to do with sacred priestly religious service from which we get the word liturgy today which is used in relationship to certain kinds of worship.

He comes as the ceremonial servant, to minister to Paul. It's a spiritual, religious and sacred term.

So, he is the servant of the Philippian church come to bring a message and he did sacred service on their behalf in the life of Paul as he was instructed to do.

The money which he brought in chapter 4 verse 18 is called an acceptable sacrifice. So, he was a priest doing sacred service and offering a sacrifice of money for the needs of Paul.

## **Why send Epaphroditus back to Philippi?**

*V 25, 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*

### **Why Paul is sending him back?**

He is not homesick,  
He is not unfaithful in the ministry.

### **Then why?**

*V26, since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*

They heard he wasn't doing well.  
How can a faithful, godly, serving the Lord will get sick?  
Sickness comes to all.

Look at the compassionate heart of Apostle Paul!

Because he is so distressed that they have heard about his difficulty and he wants to come to eliminate their distress.

Paul could have used it to his advantage, but he didn't.

The problem is Paul feels bad because Epaphroditus feels bad that the Philippians feel bad. Everybody feels bad.

*V 27, 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.*

This Epaphroditus is such a faithful brother, faithful worker, faithful soldier that he is nearly dead?

He came near death.

Is Paul sending him home because he wants to get him out of there before, he gets himself killed?

No, not at all.

"But God had mercy on him."

God spared him.

Today we are alive it's because of His pure grace!

God sovereignly was merciful to him. He went through some brush with death and God showed him mercy and delivered him from it.

God delivered Epaphroditus and God delivered Paul.

As a servant of Christ, Paul was ready to face death. As a servant of Christ Paul was ready to accept the death of his friend

Epaphroditus. But he wouldn't have liked it personally because he loved the man.

Paul is rejoicing because his life has been spared.

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

Paul is not only concerned about Epaphroditus, but he's concerned about the Philippians being concerned about Epaphroditus who is concerned about them.

- Even though Paul needs him, fellow worker,
- Even though Paul loves to have him alongside, fellow soldier, and
- Even though he knows they sent him as messenger and minister to his need,

It was mercy of God that spared his life for Paul would have had sorrow on sorrow losing him.

Paul says when you see him again you may rejoice, and when I get the word that you have seen him, and you have rejoiced then I am going to be less concerned about you.

That's why Paul was so successful in ministry, because the people to whom he ministered knew where his heart was.

Unbelievable, almost incredible the Philippians are concerned about Epaphroditus.

The Philippians aren't even asking for Epaphroditus.

**V29**, *Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;*

Receive him in the Lord, as if he were the Lord.

Then receive him with joy!

### **Why should they honour this man?**

Obviously, he has deep love for the Philippians.

**V30**, *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.*

### **What brought him close to death?**

The work of Christ.

In verse 26, "sick."

In verse 27, he was sick to the point of death.

What kind of sickness do you get from doing the work of Christ?

What disease?

We don't know any disease you get from doing the work of Christ.

**V30**, *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.*

### **What does that mean?**

The Philippians wanted to serve Paul, obviously they were deficient in it because they were too far away. They sent Epaphroditus and he was doing for Paul what the Philippians wanted to do.

In the process of serving Paul he was literally risking his life. He was risking his life because Paul was a prisoner. Paul was hated by the Romans.

Paul was despised by the ungodly society around him. He was ever and always being persecuted.

Risking his life.

He exposed himself to danger. Not necessarily to disease. He was so loyal and so faithful and so sacrificial, so humble, so uncomplaining he just put his life on the line in an effort to do what the Philippians wanted done in behalf of Paul.

In A.D. 252 the city of Carthage had a terrible plague and the heathen were so frightened of the germs that were in the bodies of the dead that they literally bagged them somehow and hurled them out of the city, not wanting to touch them for burial. Cyprian the Christian bishop gathered the congregation of the believing church together and the church members took their bodies and in a gracious act of human kindness buried the dead bodies of the plague-stricken people. According to the historians as well, they nursed even the sick people, coming close enough to them to touch them in that plague-infested city, risking their lives to save some in the city and God used them as a tremendous potential, as a tremendous force really to reach people for Christ because of their love.

## **Conclusion:**

Epaphroditus means favourite of Aphrodite. A little twist on that that must have been in the mind of Paul.

Aphrodite was the goddess of luck; she was the goddess of luck as well as beauty. When the Greeks rolled the dice in their games, the common word they used when they roll the dice was "Epaphroditus."

In other words, they wanted favour from Aphrodite. So, Paul is doing a little play on the name of Epaphroditus. He was a favourite of Aphrodite by name and he gambled with his life. He risked his life.

Do you need a better example than that of a sacrificial life?  
You have Paul.

The sacrificial rejoicer who rejoiced to pour out his life an offering.

You have Timothy the single-minded sympathizer whose interests were only the things of Christ and who would feel like Paul felt in his heart about other people.

We have this loving gambler, Epaphroditus, who literally threw his life away, risking great danger to fill up that which someone else wanted done on behalf of someone else.

**What have you sacrificed in ministry to others?**

**What have you turned from in order to wholly focus on Christ?**

**What of Paul is there in you who sacrificed everything?**

**What of Timothy is there in you who turns from all the temptations to focus only on the interest of Christ?**

**What have you turned from to focus on the interest of Christ?**

**We really don't like risk, do we?**

First thing we get saved, that eliminates eternal risk. Heaven for sure, no risk.

Then we back into life and we have got to eliminate all the risk in life. No risk, insulated, isolated, comfortable, got all the money we need, got the burglar alarm working, got the fence, got the gate, got our life closed in, no risk and giving away absolutely nothing.

We have so few and the Lord's convicted my own heart and I trust yours as well to think about how to be an Epaphroditus and give myself away for a cause other than my own fulfilment.