

Becoming Epaphroditus

Franklin Church of Christ
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June 17, 2007
PM Assembly

Introduction:

If we listed our favorite Bible characters, I imagine none of us would list Epaphroditus. In fact, some probably just said “Who?” Epaphroditus doesn’t get much screen time in the Bible. He’s a supporting character, not a headliner. Yet, what an amazing man he must have been. He is mentioned in only two passages—**Philippians 2:25-30; 4:18**. He was sent by the Philippian church to minister a gift to Paul and then sent back by Paul to provide encouragement to the brethren. Notice how Paul and the Philippian brethren felt about him. The Philippians were distressed to hear he had been ill. Paul said God spared Epaphroditus because if he had died, Paul would have had sorrow upon sorrow. Paul commanded the Philippians to honor men like Epaphroditus. What made this man so special?

Discussion:

- I. Epaphroditus was a brother.
 - A. Paul’s first description of Epaphroditus was of brotherhood. There is no doubt the two men were brothers in Christ. However, I do not believe that is Paul’s point. The first term Paul used to describe Epaphroditus demonstrated not their technical relationship, but the affection they had for one another. They were brothers, tied together by the bonds of brotherly love.
 - B. If we want to make a difference in other’s lives... If we want to be the kind of people others are concerned about, then we need to be brothers (or sisters) to them. We need to have that affection for them. Peter claimed we purified our souls in order to love our brethren (**I Peter 1:22**).
 - C. How would we behave if we treated each other with brotherly love and affection? We would put away any malice or bitterness and clothe ourselves with kindness, compassion and forgiveness (**Ephesians 4:31-32**). We would put others before ourselves (**Philippians 2:3-4**). **Proverbs 17:17** says a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity. If we are brotherly, when times are tough, we would bear there to bear one another’s burdens (**Galatians 6:2**). If we will be like Epaphroditus, we must not be fair-weather friends, but burden bearing brothers.
- II. Epaphroditus was a fellow worker.
 - A. Anybody who is a student of modern teamwork and leadership literature will find this descriptive term very interesting. The word translated by “fellow worker” is “sunergos.” The modern word “synergy” derives from this term. Synergy refers to the exponential amount of work we accomplish working together. Like **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** says, two are better than one, getting more return for their labor. That is, working together they get more done than working separately. Synergy is adding 1+1 but getting 3 or more. I heard the story once of a horse-pulling competition. In the end the first place winner had pulled 5,000 lbs and the second 4,000. For kicks, they hooked the two together to see what they could pull. We might expect 9,000 lbs. Instead, they pulled 12,000. That is what Epaphroditus was. He was a worker whose teamwork caused the total to be more than the sum of the parts.
 - B. There are two points in this term.
 1. *Epaphroditus was a worker*, not a pew-warmer, not an attender. He did not expect others to work so he could reap the benefits. He worked. If we want to be like Epaphroditus, we must work. That means sacrificing time and relaxation. That means not being focused on recreation. That means putting our shoulder to the grindstone.
 2. *Epaphroditus was a team player*. Paul didn’t just call him a worker, but a fellow worker. Epaphroditus didn’t try to go it alone. He didn’t try to stand out and shine above all others. He was a joint worker. He didn’t mind putting on the yoke and pulling with someone else. There is a sense of unity here that Paul described in **Philippians 2:1-2**.
 - C. If we want to be like Epaphroditus, we have to work. But we have to do it with others, not seeking to be the lead dog, but just working alongside our brethren so we can accomplish more.
- III. Epaphroditus was a fellow soldier.
 - A. This description takes the last to a higher level. Not only was Epaphroditus a fellow worker, he was a fellow soldier. Working demonstrates discipline and commitment. Soldiering demonstrates doing so in the face of enemy fire.

- B. I can't help but think of the story of Nehemiah's wall builders in **Nehemiah 4:17-18**. When they started building the wall, they were fellow workers. They each did their part to rebuild the city wall. But then the enemies threatened attack. The fellow workers became fellow soldiers. Not only carrying out the work with one hand but holding their weapons with the other.
- C. Many Christians work until they find out folks in the world and false religion don't like what we are doing. When opposition starts, some Christians want to back off and blend in. We can't do that. We have to be workers and soldiers. We have to fight the good fight, keeping the faith in the presence of opposition (cf. **I Timothy 1:18; 6:12**). We need to put on the armor of God (**Ephesians 6:14-18**) and step into the battle.
- D. But we must notice Epaphroditus was not just any soldier. He was a fellow soldier. Sadly, it sometimes seems out of our list of positive attributes for Epaphroditus, the one we Christians most have down is fighting. Sadly, we too often fight each other. Remember **Galatians 5:15**. Instead of fighting each other, we need to be fellow soldiers fighting against our common enemy.

IV. Epaphroditus was a messenger.

- A. Interestingly, the word translated messenger is "apostolos," or apostle, meaning one who is sent. **Proverbs 26:6** gets to the heart of why this is a great characteristic. It is folly to send a message by the hand of a fool. Instead, you want to make sure your messenger is trustworthy.
- B. Epaphroditus was so important to Paul and the Philippians because he stood out as trustworthy. They knew they could entrust him with their messages and their gifts (**Philippians 4:18**). How easy it would have been for Epaphroditus to skip town with the material goods and monetary gift the Philippian congregation had sent. But Epaphroditus was trustworthy.
- C. If we want to be like Epaphroditus we need to be people who can be trusted. We need to be people who keep our word. Our yes should be yes and our no, no (**Matthew 5:37**). If we commit to an action, we must follow through. If we say something is just so, then it should be just so. We must be trustworthy as messengers.

V. Epaphroditus was a minister.

- A. The word minister does not mean preacher. Sadly, we have made the word "minister" a title even though it was never intended to be so. It is a description. Ministering means serving. However, the word translated here is not the one we more commonly think of for minister or servant (diakonos). It is "leitourgos." The family of words to which this one belongs, initially referred to public servants who carried out their duties at personal expense. Thus, this term highlights not only service, but the personally sacrificial nature of service.
- B. Many Christians are ready to serve, as long as it doesn't get in the way of our favorite tv show. We are ready to serve, as long as we get to take care of our own house first. We are ready to serve, as long as we don't miss the football game. We are ready to serve as long as we have time after we take Jr. to his football game and Sally to her piano recital. Epaphroditus was not merely a servant. He was a sacrificing servant.
- C. If we want to be like Epaphroditus, we have to be prepared to sacrifice. **Hebrews 13:16** tells us we must learn to do good and share. God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices. But rest assured. They are sacrifices. They will cost us. We will lose something else that we wanted. This is a matter of priority. We can do anything we want. But we can't do everything we want. We have to make serving the Lord and His people a priority and sacrifice some of our other desires. Then we will be like Epaphroditus.

Conclusion:

We have not examined Epaphroditus so we might learn how to be honored by men. We have not done so merely because we want people to mourn us when we are gone. Rather, we have done so because we know this is the kind of person we want to be. We want to be a person who impacts others positively. We want to be a person that stands up in God's kingdom and does good. We want to be like Epaphroditus. If we would be like him, we must love as brothers, we must work as a team, we must stand up in the face of the enemy as soldiers, we must be trustworthy in our work and we must sacrifice as servants. This is a noble calling, yet so few actually pursue this course. May each of us be part of the few who stand out.