

Epaphroditus

"But I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, since he longed after you all, and was sore troubled, because ye had heard that he was sick; for indeed he was sick nigh unto death; but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow. I have sent him therefore the more diligently, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice and that I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy: and hold such in love: because that for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death; hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me" (Phil. 2:25-30).

The brother named here (and once again in 4:18) appears only in this letter which he apparently carried from Paul to the Philippian church -- thus all we learn from these verses.

Epaphroditus was the "*messenger*" of the Philippian brethren to carry to Paul the gift that church had collected for his needs. There are two different Greek words which are translated "*messenger*," both of which are frequently translated into more familiar words. The first word is *angelos* from which comes the familiar word "*angel*." The second word is *apostolos* which most often appears as "*apostle*." It is the second of these two words which is translated as "*messenger*" in this Philippian text.

Epaphroditus was the "*apostle*" of the Philippian brethren, an "*apostle*" in the sense he was sent from Philippi to Rome with a gift for Paul; corresponding in the same sense that Barnabas is called an "*apostle*" in Acts 14:4; 14: an "*apostle*" because he (along with Paul) was sent out by the Antioch church to preach the gospel on Paul's first missionary journey. Do not forget, however, that when Paul speaks of himself as an apostle of Christ, he identifies himself as an apostle with the twelve apostles, personally chosen and sent by our Savior to "*preach the gospel into all the world*": a different sense of the word than is found here of Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus, in filling this service to Paul, was doing the "*work of Christ*." He was just a "*messenger*," carrying collected funds to aid Paul's temporal needs, but that also is the work of Christ! Remember, those on the Lord's right hand at judgment will be those who had ministered to Christ when they ministered to the brethren of Christ (Matt. 25:31ff).

Epaphroditus had become gravely ill in Rome. His illness greatly distressed the apostle for Paul was virtually alone and it would seem a "double dose" of

trial that, added to his grievous imprisonment, he should be further burdened by the death of one who had fallen ill by providing service to him.

This short note about the gravity of Epaphroditus' illness is revealing! One might be disposed to reason why Paul, who had on other occasions wrought great signs which included even raising a young man from the dead, did not heal this gravely ill brother from Philippi (Acts 19:11; 20:9-12). The truth is that, contrary to all the claims of modern day "healers," miracles of healing were primarily to confirm the preached word. Healing of sick brethren was not the "norm." Somewhere in his journeys Paul had left a brother named Trophimus sick in Miletus and he admonished Timothy to "*take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities*" (2 Tim. 4:20; 1 Tim. 5:23).

Although Epaphroditus was the messenger of Philippi, he was also Paul's fellow-soldier and fellow-worker. It is hard to determine whether such a reference is to his association with Paul presently in Rome or formerly when Paul preached in Philippi. Whatever the case, he had labored with Paul in the gospel. His coming to Paul in Rome had refreshed Paul's spirit; his illness caused Paul anxiety and sorrow; his return to health was both a measure of relief and joy for both Paul and Philippian brethren. The work of Epaphroditus was not spectacular as some might view it, but highly important and essential to the Philippians, Paul, and Christ. Let us also do "*whatsoever our hands find to do*"!

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