Epaphroditus, Service in Sickness

Philippians 2:25-30

Introduction:

After Paul told the Philippians to, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” (v. 5) he gave them the perfect example of humility, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ (5-11). He made application from Jesus’ life in verses 12-18 telling them to, “work out your own salvation” (v. 12). Then, lest they should think that the life of Jesus would be impossible to imitate, he gave them two human examples of humility: Timothy, his son in the faith, (19-24) and, in today’s passage, Epaphroditus, his brother in the faith.

I. Service with Paul – 2:25

A. He was Sent to the Philippians by Paul – 2:25a

“Yet I considered it necessary [ἡγησάμην Ἀναγκαῖον] to send to you ﻿﻿Epaphroditus,”

Why did Paul think it was necessary? (See v. 26)

1. He was longing for you all, and

2. He was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. (More on that later)

1. Paul’s Opinion of Him - “my brother”

He was a brother in the family. He came from the church in Philippi. There is no indication that Paul had known him prior to his coming to Rome. Paul was there in AD 50/51 and in AD 59? (5 days) Timothy was Paul’s son. So, Paul is promoting family spirit.

2. Paul’s Operation with Him -

a. A fellow worker in the field.

He was a worker in helping to evangelize Rome. He was also open to do menial tasks for Paul.

b. A fellow soldier in the fight.

There was a fight, especially in Rome. The official religion was Emperor Worship. There was even a suit of spiritual armor - Eph. 6. Judaism had been given the right to exist, but not Christianity until AD 300 under Constantine. So it was a fight against a physical foe as well as a spiritual foe.

B. Sent to Paul by the Philippians – 2:25b

1. His Assignment - Messenger

“your messenger”

As a messenger he brought a gift of money - “for your sharing in the gospel from the first day until *the* now,” literally, “the now (present) gift”.

“I am full, having received from ﻿﻿Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you.” (4:18)

“The first day” For even in Thess. you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities (4.16) [first trip]

2. His Assistance - Minister

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“the one who ministered to my need”

He came with a monetary gift, but also a gift of helps. (See above.)

II. Sickness in Prison – 2:26-27

A. The Selflessness of his Suffering – 2:26

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

Epaphroditus became ill while he was serving with Paul.

Maybe he is the one who found Onesimus and brought him to Paul. Where did he find him? Not in some Motel downtown. He was in the slums where there is danger and disease. He became ill serving the Lord.

He was worried, not because he was sick, but because they had heard and were worrying about him. This was an indication of his selflessness.

B. The Seriousness of His Sickness – 2:27

“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.”

He almost died. One has to wonder why Paul did not just pray for him and he would be healed.

First, there was no carte-blanche gift of healing. There were two gifts that were plural;

1. The gifts of miracles.
2. The gifts of healings.

No one had either of these two gifts to use at will. When the need arose, a gift of healing was given for that occasion. Apparently it was not God’s will to heal Epaphroditus before he almost died. By the time of this letter he was able to travel so he must have gotten well, either by medicine or a miracle in God’s good time. Paul simply says, “but God had mercy on him, so, he recovered.

Then Paul indicates that he was very interested in Epaphroditus’ recovery because he says: and not only on him but on me also, “lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.”

Second, the sign gifts were not as prevalent at this time, since the New Testament revelation was almost complete. (See I Cor. 13:8-13) also the booklet “Biblical Tongues” and the Seminar “Spiritual Gifts”

While Epaphroditus was selfless, he was not the only one.

III. Scenes of the Past – 2:28-30

A. What Paul Requested of these Believers – 2:28-29

1. Rejoice – 2:28

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

Paul sent him back more eagerly, with special haste. Paul’s sorrow would be lessened by the knowledge that the Philippians were less sorrowful.

He encouraged them to rejoice for several reasons:

1. That Epaphroditus completed his mission successfully - Rejoice!

2. He had been such a help to Paul in the work of the Lord - Rejoice!

3. He had not been robbed on the way - Rejoice!

4. Though he had been sick, for which they sorrowed greatly, he did not die and was now well – “And again I say, “Rejoice”

2. Receive – 2:29a

“Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness,”

Some might be tempted to look down on him because he got sick and was perhaps an additional burden on Paul. Receive him with all gladness!

3. Revere – 2:29b

“and hold such men in esteem” (precious); (ἐντίμους)

Paul may have thought about Jesus’ words in Matt. 13:57, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.”

Like one of our expressions: “Familiarity breeds contempt”

This word “precious” is used of Jesus in I Peter 2:4

“Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, ﻿﻿rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious,”

They are to consider Epaphroditus, and such men as he, as honorable and precious.

B. What Paul Recalled of this Brother – 2:30

1. His Faithfulness – 2:30a

“because for the work of Christ he came close to death, ﻿﻿not regarding his life,”

How would you like to be remembered? -- Money, Intelligence, Ability?

The most important ability is Avail-ability. That is what Epaphroditus excelled in.

2. His Fellowship – 2:30b

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“to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”

The Philippians were not able to be there to help Paul. Epaphroditus and Paul fellowshipped in the work of the Lord, which is the greatest fellowship there is.

Conclusion: