

## 1. Epaphroditus the Gospel Helper

- a. Paul considers Epaphroditus to be an honorable co-worker in the work of Christ: a Gospel Helper
- b. He establishes the relationship as one of helping alongside of each other
- c. Relationship to Paul
  - i. my **brother**
    1. Paul the Jew claims brotherhood with Epaphroditus the Greek (name comes from "near Aphrodite", the Greek goddess of love, means "lovely")
      - a. It is possible that Epaphroditus came from a family who was in an Aphroditic cult
      - b. The brotherhood of Christ knows no man's history defines him
    2. "brother" is a sign of great affection
    3. In the Church there is genuine brotherhood that exists not only due to common purpose (club) or common ancestry (nations), common political endeavors (party), or common geography (citizens)
    4. Christians have common Savior and Lord, a common Father who chose them for adoption in His Son, and a common Holy Spirit who has sealed them for adoption in Christ.
      - a. Epaphroditus is a fellow brother with all believers in the body of Christ
      - b. Paul is moving in crescendo from general relationships to more particular relationship with Epaph.
    5. Are we looking past the typical barriers that divide us to love one another as brothers and sisters?
      - a. Is the Church of Jesus Christ our ultimate family bond? Is Christ our ultimate Brother, the Father our Ultimate Father whom we follow?
  - ii. my fellow **worker**
    1. emphasis on the "fellow" or "with" aspect of working
    2. Epaphroditus is considered equally a worker of Christ as Paul is
      - a. He was active in gospel work
        - i. Others who are so mentioned:
          1. Aquila and Prisca in Ephesus (Rom 16)
          2. Timothy and Titus, elders (Rom 16; 2 Cor 8:23)
          3. Clement, Euodia, Syntyche (Phil 4:3)
          4. Aristarchus and Mark (Col 4)
        - ii. A bringer of joy to Paul
          1. He was grateful for Epaphroditus, as if the Philippians had sent the best possible man for his good
          2. "complete what was lacking in your service to me"
            - a. "if there was anything that you left, Epaphroditus was super-sufficient to me"
    - b. What did he do?
      - i. Brought the Philippians' letter to Paul
      - ii. Was there to care for Paul in his imprisonment on behalf of the Philippians

1. Ended up needing to be cared for by Paul because of his illness
  2. This may be why he desires to return: there may have been some unhappiness on the Philippians' part that Epaphroditus ended up being somewhat "needy" with Paul (even though it wasn't his fault)
  3. Paul is correcting any such thinking here
- c. Do we consider some ministry as more "working for Christ" than other ministry?
- i. All gospel ministry, done for Christ, by the Spirit, to edify the Church, is important
  - ii. "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?" (1 Corinthians 12:17)
3. God desires those who work hard for the Kingdom and glory of Christ
- a. Rev 2:2-3 – "I know your works, your toil and patient endurance...having tested those who call themselves apostles and are not...enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary."
  - b. We, in the affluent West, have ceased or greatly diminished our gospel work because we have confused our affluence with God's Kingdom
    - i. We have lost the ability to speak prophetically to our culture because we too much a part of it and are seen as such
    - ii. We no longer have the ability to discern what is right from wrong because we have fallen away from intensive prayer and study of God's Word
    - iii. So we have ceased to proclaim the apostolic gospel and have turned instead to man-centered self-congratulatory falsity
4. Four areas of work which we can strive in:
- a. Intensified dependence upon the Lord through prayer
  - b. Intellectual study of the Word
  - c. Social works of Kingdom value
  - d. Evangelistic zeal for Christ
- iii. my fellow **soldier** (comrade)
1. fought side-by-side with Paul for the sake of the gospel
  2. Stood firm, even to the point of death's door, for the glory of Christ
  3. Gospel soldiers fight not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of darkness and deception in the spiritual realm
- d. Relationship to the Church
- i. your **emissary**
    1. literally, "apostle", one sent on behalf of another
    2. Epaphroditus was sent on behalf of the Philippians to minister to Paul in his imprisonment
  - ii. your **minister** (priestly, see v17) to my need
    1. title of high honor, meaning "one who does priestly service"
    2. offers sacrifices on behalf of another
      - a. the Philippians gave monetarily and physically to Paul's care
      - b. They sacrificed their own for him

c. this time it was almost Epaphroditus own life

## 2. Gospel Helpers Risk Great Loss for the Work of Christ

- a. Paul sent him because he had been longing for the Philippians
  - i. distressed
    1. because you heard that he was sick
  - ii. he almost died
    1. for the work of Christ (v30)
    2. note that Paul doesn't mince words about the reality and severity of the danger to E's life
      - a. sometimes we lessen the reality
      - b. "it wasn't a big deal" or "He's just fine"
- b. Not every risk comes from enemies of the Cross of Christ
  - i. Many risks involve dangers to the body from nature and "circumstance"
    1. David Brainerd died of tuberculosis at 30 years old after many trips and much time spent serving the native American tribes in the Northeastern US

It is as hard to number the great company seen by John on Patmos as to count that company – red, brown, yellow, and white – brought into the Kingdom of God directly or indirectly by the young consumptive who burned himself out in the wilderness of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey over two centuries ago. ~Clyde Kilby, *Heroic Colonial Christians*

2. Paul talks about "squeezing" and "difficulties" of his travels and kingdom building endeavors as the means by which Christ is glorified in his weaknesses (2 Cor 12:10)
- ii. This is equally "pouring oneself out" for the sake of Christ and the faith of others
  1. This behavior by E. is something for which he is to be "honored" or "considered precious" to the Philippian church
    - a. "because he almost died for the work of Christ"
    - b. "honor men such as this"
      - i. It is the servants of the saints that are to be precious to the Church
      - ii. Epaphroditus held no special office in the church that we know of, but he worked for Christ and His cause of building His church that the gates of Hell would not overcome
      - iii. It is people like this that are highly valuable to the Body of Christ: servants with daring resolve and risking commitment to Jesus.
      - iv. They deserve our honor
    2. What are the risks for us in caring for others' needs, to work for Christ, to proclaim the gospel?
  - iii. Paul gives Epaphroditus as another example of Jesus: the great Servant who poured out His richness of Heaven to become man and die in our place that we might be made children of God (2:1-11)
- c. Gospel Helpers bear great risks and sufferings because they are filled up with the presence and promises of Christ

- i. The Lord always brings suffering to draw close to Himself, in order to become our greatest treasure and to reveal to us the fullness for which we were created: worshipping Him with joy!

"The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God."  
Joni Eareckson Tada

- ii. Even in our suffering, God's mercy is abundant, for He has provided His very own Spirit to indwell us and comfort us, drawing us into the presence of God in fullness of joy and incomparable resilience to the suffering.

A believer may be in the saddest and darkest condition imaginable. Even so, the Holy Spirit is able to break through all this and bring to mind the promises of Christ. By this work, the Holy Spirit enables Christians to sit in dungeons, rejoice in flames and glory in troubles. If he brings to mind the promises of Christ for our comfort, neither Satan nor man, neither sin nor the world, nor even death itself, shall take away our comfort. Sometimes disasters and distresses appear which are so full of horror and darkness that saints are tempted to give up in despair. So how greatly are their spirits revived when the Holy Spirit brings the words of Christ to their minds for their comfort and joy. Thus, believers are not dependent upon outward circumstances for their happiness, for they have the inward and powerfully effective work of the Holy Spirit, to whom they give themselves up by faith. ~John Owen

## Conclusion:

"We were created for something bigger than ourselves. The Bible reveals the true story that is to capture our lives. We are ambassadors of the King, proclaiming to broken and sinful people the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his lordship over all creation until he comes again." - Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk*

Just like Jesus, the Suffering Servant, we hold it in high honor to pour ourselves out for the work of Christ. For we were made for such splendor as treasuring Jesus more than life itself. And we shall not fear the ills and pains of working hard for the cause of Christ, as if our commitment and endeavors had greater power than His Spirit within us to remove our joy. His Spirit continues, by promise and by presence, to reveal to us the greatness of the comfort of belonging to Christ. In this we rejoice! God is our Father. Christ is our Lord and Captain in this struggle. The Holy Spirit is our Aid to lead us to the comforts and joys of the gospel and the strength to burn ourselves out for the sake of the faith of the saints.

Let us set our minds to care for our brothers and sisters, ridding our churches of racism, ceasing from holding our brothers and sisters' pasts against them as if we were saved and blessed by God because of our own righteousness. Let us set our feet to working hard for the sake of Christ: intensifying our dependence upon God through prayer, committing hard to studying the Word of God with intellectual vigor, pouring ourselves out in service and ministries of mercy to our city, and

proclaiming the gospel with a zeal full of the Holy Spirit. You and I are fellow soldiers in this battle for truth in which the gospel must be proclaimed. Let us set our faces like flint and remain immovable in the fierce onslaughts of deception that so-called Christians throw upon the Cross of Christ. The gospel stands firm...let us stand behind Him.