***Epaphroditus - PH60-01  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 2:25-30***

**Epaphroditus**

We're looking at Philippians 2:25-30, and we are studying this man Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus has come to Rome from the very church in Philippi to whom Paul is writing this particular letter. He comes on a specific mission. That mission was twofold. First of all, the Christians in the congregations that met through the city of Philippi, in the various house churches, gathered an offering, and apparently one of a substantial amount. The man Epaphroditus that we've been studying has been delegated by the church to carry this offering to Paul, who is, as you know, in prison. Secondly, he was also commissioned to help Paul in any way that he could. He was given the direction to come and to assist Paul in the work of the ministry in Rome. Paul has decided to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi, in the process of which he's going to send to the church this epistle, the book of Philippians.

**The Book of Philippians**

Of course, as Paul wrote the book of Philippians, he was just writing a letter. He was not aware that God the Holy Spirit had moved in on this particular letter, and that He had now superintended in a special way which we refer to as inspiration. Paul was not aware of the fact that, at this moment, he was now an inspired writer. He wrote other letters here and there throughout his travels, many of which are lost. Those lost letters were letters which were just ordinary letters such as you and I could write. They were not inspired Scripture. But here in the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul is being guided by God the Holy Spirit. So I want you to remember that. Everything we read in this book is of a very special nature. It is information which not only the Philippians needed, but which also we needed 2,000 years later, and God the Holy Spirit was preparing this for us here in this congregation as much as he was for the Philippian congregation.

So Epaphroditus comes to bring the money, and then to stay on to be an assistant to Paul as a contribution from the church in Philippi. Paul says that Epaphroditus was related to him in a threefold way: as a brother; as a fellow worker; and, as a fellow soldier. He also says that Epaphroditus was related to the Christians back in Philippi as one who had been commissioned to bring the money to Paul, and as their minister, to help Paul in his work. So we have a five-fold description of this man Epaphroditus.

I'd like to look a little bit at his personality, and a little closer at these relationships that the apostle Paul referred to. Verse 25, which we have analyzed, we may put together as expressing this idea: "But I considered it absolutely necessary to send face-to-face to you Epaphroditus, my brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister of my need." The relationship of Epaphroditus to Paul as a communicator of doctrine is a relationship which every church member holds relative to its pastor-teacher. This three-fold relationship is so violated today in churches that it is in large measure the reason that local churches are not very effective in getting out an understanding of the Word of God's people.

**Brother**

The first relationship, as you remember, was that of a brother. Epaphroditus was first a brother in the Lord. No one has a right to be associated with you in God's work if he is not a believer. All born again people fill this particular level of relationship to the pastor-teacher. It is the basic relationship within the local church. We may view this as the basic foundational block within the Christian community–that we are brethren; that is, that we have been born into the same family. It doesn't matter what your spiritual maturity level may be. Spiritual maturity is an inclined plane, and you may be going forward, or you may be sliding backward. You may have made a lot of progress toward maturity or you may still just barely be out of babyhood. But the point is that you are (whatever your maturity level) a brother to your pastor-teacher in the faith–and not only to him, but to everyone else who comes your way who is a communicator of the Word of God.

It is very tempting for preachers to be willing to incorporate unbelievers in the ministry. One of the reasons for this is that a pastor-teacher is dependent upon this structure of relationship within the local church. ... If believers withdraw their support from a pastor-teacher, Satan is able to tempt him to look to unbelievers to give him an assist in the work. That is the reason that you find some really strange characters in some churches who are in positions of responsibility, doing God's work, who should never be there, because after you've talked to them, you've discovered that they are not believers at all. Where you have a pastor who is a believer, he should not have to look to unbelievers to help him to do the work of the Lord. So it's tempting to go out into the community and to ask for assistance from unbelievers in order to get the Lord's work done.

This is the most basic relationship that Christians have to one another–this relationship of being fellow members of the household of faith. Epaphroditus was first of all a born-again man, and thus was related to Paul as his brother.

**Fellow Worker**

There was a second relationship, and that was that of a fellow worker. Out of the mass of those who are born again believers in any local church, 100% of the brothers will not all be fellow workers. Only a certain percentage of the brothers, generally, are fellow workers, and that will vary. As a matter of fact, I read a statistic one time that showed the relationship between the foundational block of those who were believers in the church and the block of those who were fellow workers. Only 15% moved up. Of the total membership, only 15% were fellow workers within the assembly and within the work of that church. Now, that is a fantastic statistic. It's a shameful statistic. Yet, generally, that is true. Out of every 100 members in the local church, 15 of them are doing the work of the ministry in some respect. The other 85 are coming in; sitting; listening; and, walking back out the door. They may be dropping a little offering as they go by. But their spiritual gifts are not being incorporated within the context of that ministry in whatever areas and whatever fronts it serves on.

So Epaphroditus was also in this second stage–that he was a fellow worker with Paul. Of course, all Christians in the congregation qualify to be in this category and this relationship to their pastor-teacher communicator. Not all will do that. It is a select company of positive believers. Some who may be fellow workers at one time, as brothers, will not necessarily be fellow workers in the future. Some are fellow workers on an erratic basis. Sometimes they are in there doing the job; then they get a little tired; they take a vacation; and, they disappear. Then, all of a sudden, they surface again; they do something; and, then they disappear. They are on again and off again as fellow workers. This group comes into closer contact with the pastor-teacher than the brother group. Obviously, the fellow workers in a church are going to be in touch with the pastor-teacher who is administrating the operation of that local church. That would be in the nature of the case. So these are the people who are really going to know what's going on in that church, because they are in the category of being fellow workers.

**Competition**

However, this is also the area of the most intense competition, and the area which Satan strikes the hardest. In this area where you are just a Christian (you are a brother or a sister in the faith), Satan does not hit that because there's not much he can do about it. He can't take you back out of the family of God. He can't remove you from the household of faith. So there is not much he can do with this basic group. But when you get up to where you are in the fellow worker category, there he has a field day.

This is the area where he can cause Christians to start competing with one another. This is the area where you get one club leader to start competing with another club leader in order to show them how much better their club is than the other club. This is the area where one teacher in the academy can start competing with another teacher in the academy to show how much better they are in the business of being school people. This is the area where church boards can start competing with one another. This is the area where the church choir can try to be more spectacular in its musical presentations than the church band. The church band comes back with another biggie to outdo the church choir.

Anytime you start competing within the local church, you're playing into Satan's hands. We're not supposed to compete with one another. Some people even sing like that in the congregation. If Mrs. Jones is singing over here, and Mrs. Smith hears her, Mrs. Smith sings a little louder, and Mrs. Jones pitches herself a little higher. Pretty soon you've got a real cattle calling going across the place.

It is fantastic what Christians will compete about. As fellow workers, Satan can undermine what you're doing by causing you to lose sight of what it is you are doing, and who it is you are serving. You get your eyes off the Lord, and so you start being a competitor. This is the place where bitterness is engendered among Christians in one way or another. Satan has all kinds of areas of bitterness to create. This is the area for hurt feelings. This is where being injured; having your feelings hurt; or, being wounded comes in. Are any of you wounded? That's because the devil is working on you. Do any of you feel that you are not appreciated tonight? Well, the devil is working on you so that you will not react as a fellow worker. You will decide, "I don't want to be a fellow worker anymore." He is hitting this group in every imaginable way.

One of the nicest ways for him to do it is to say, "Oh, well, it doesn't do any good to try to help. My ideas are never accepted." That's the devil himself talking. If you come up with a good idea to a knowledgeable church administration, I guarantee you that it will be accepted, and it will be welcomed. Even if you come up with a poor idea, it will get a hearing. But after you have said your idea, you must be willing to allow the administration and the judgment of the leadership to act upon it or not to act upon it. But one of the most valuable things fellow workers do is to keep passing ideas up to the pastor-teacher and to the people who are on the boards to come up with some vision.

A lot of work in the local church sits on dead center because there is no vision. There are no ideas. There is not some concept of moving in some direction of doing something. You are not a fellow worker if you're sitting around and waiting for your pastor-teacher to come up with the solutions to the problems. You become a fellow worker when you start deciding to help come up with some of the ideas for solving the problems.

This is the area where people become envious of one another. This is the area, consequently, where many Christians just detach themselves from the local church ministry. They're still brothers, but they are no longer workers. If you're going to be a fellow worker, you're in a specialized group. But it is the group in which God intends you to be. He doesn't intend for you to just be one of the Christians there. He intends for each of us to find what our gift is; what our capacities are; what the money is that we have; what the time is that we have; and, what our status of life is. The Bible says, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." If you're younger, you should have a lot more hustle, energy, and capacity than the people around the place who are older who don't have that much capacity because of their years. Whatever it is, God expects you to use it and to be a fellow worker in that place. The same relationship that Epaphroditus had to Paul as brother and fellow worker, we are to have in every local church from that time to this.

**Fellow Soldier**

Then there is a third category, and that is the fellow soldier. Epaphroditus was that. You can see that if a pastor-teacher has only brethren to lean against, his job is very hard. If he gets fellow workers, that has considerably eased the job. But even that is not enough for him to lean on. Make no mistake, he does have to have these categories to lean on. If Satan tries to sell you on the idea that any pastor-teacher does not need these categories to lean on, you have swallowed a false notion–hook, line, and sinker, and you better get rid of it in a hurry. There is no pastor-teacher who is capable of carrying on, no matter how sharp he may be, without these categories to lean on. His maximum stability as a pastor-teacher is going to come when he has fellow soldiers up there along with fellow workers upon whom he may lean. This is the highest level of relationship between a pastor-teacher and church members. Not all fellow workers are ready to be fellow soldiers, because being fellow soldiers means getting into the angelic conflict. It means getting ready to fight for certain specific objectives. That means that there are going to be some sufferings and some sacrifices.

As we get to looking at Epaphroditus a little more, we're going to discover that it almost cost him his life. He exemplifies for us Christian service that simply is ready to exhaust yourself. This is service to the point of physical exhaustion. Epaphroditus knew that this was the business of soldiering. Soldiers in combat are going to suffer. They're going to sacrifice. They know that the enemy is going to resist them. So it is this group that takes the brunt of the attack and of the problems and of the burden in any local church. It is the fellow soldiers who are the prime target of Satan. They are the ones who most regularly are hurt. They're the ones around whom the battle rages the hardest. They're the ones who are mistreated and misjudged in a variety of ways.

Most Christians prefer not to be in the category of the fellow soldier. Most Christians are quite happy to come far enough up the scale to where they are fellow workers, and then to pass up the supplies to the fellow soldiers. They feel that their job is to praise the Lord and pass the ammunition. So they prefer being in that category rather than to get themselves caught up to where they are fellow soldiers, where they now have themselves under Satan's fire. That fire and that battle, you will remember, does not include just some unseen enemy. That unseen enemy is indeed behind the battle. However, the unseen enemy uses people we can see–people we know, and sometimes people who are other Christians.

So most Christians recoil from the thought of having wounds inflicted upon themselves by unbelievers or by spiritually insane Christians. That's what people who have lost their spiritual orientation do. They are spiritually insane. They have lost their sense of values. Therefore, they will seek to wound pastor-teachers. They will seek to strike out against the very source of their spiritual life blood.

One of the things that I find interesting in preaching, when I can repeat an area that we have taught before, is to compare the old notes with the new notes. I was pointing out to Mrs Danish this morning that I had the old notes on the book of Philippians, and I showed her that about two-thirds of the first page, of about three pages of notes, covered today's message. It took about six pages today to cover the same territory. Why? Well, anybody who is in the ministry should recognize and realize that anytime there is re-preaching, it is to be expanded and to be advanced.

However, I found a curious thing in the ministry. I found something interesting about some people when I taught them this same passage out of a set of notes that took maybe two-thirds of a page to preach from. My point is that the content was not nearly as in-depth nor in detail of explanation, nor I doubt as clear. There were people that when I was teaching them little segments like that, they thought I was a prince. They couldn't do enough for me. I was the king. They just couldn't wait to get to the door to say nice things to me. Then the preaching began to take some depth and some authority that leaned upon what God the Holy Spirit led a man like Paul to put into this book in the first place in the original languages. Then I noticed that they were no longer rushing to the door to hail me as the fair-haired prince that they had found me to be before.

Actually, it took me a little while to catch on to this peculiarity of spiritual insanity. Their sense of values was actually so balled up that when they were getting considerably less introduction and insight into the Word of God (and I mean considerable less), they found that they could be very warmly disposed toward me. But when they began to get the Word of God in greater substance, I would have thought they would have risen up, as many of you have, and said, "This is the greatest thing that has ever happened to us. This has been meaningful to me and has brought me to a walk with God that I not only have now, but I could not have had before you started doing this." It seems that if there was any time that they would have called me "Prince John," or maybe even "King John," it would certainly have been now. Instead, all I got was dirty looks.

Now I understand that the problem was that they were fellow workers who did not want to be fellow soldiers. They were hearing the Word of God explained in such a way that the loopholes had been cut out. They were finding applications that were cutting them off from a bunch of their sweet carnal Christian friends, and from a lot of things that were practices in their lives; a lot of competitions; a lot of envies; a lot of jealousies; and, a lot of seeking of status. They were being cut off at the pass. Finally, rather than change their carnality, they decided simply (like the Arabs) to fold up their tents and run off into the night.

We're talking about people who don't have the taste to be soldiers of Jesus Christ. Yes, they may be summertime soldiers. When things are not too hot–yes. But not when the pastor-teacher begins talking so clearly that they have to take sides. Don't you just hate it when the preacher talks in such a way that you have to take sides? Don't you hate it when he talks in such a way that you have to take a position on an issue? Don't you just love it when he just explains it in such general terms that everybody can do what he wants to do, and you don't feel under pressure? That way you don't find yourself being cut off from other people because you have taken a position on something relative to the Word of God.

This is the area where desertion takes place in its maximum way in a local church. This is the area that members choose to flee from the heat of the demonic contact. But Christian soldiers, who understand what they've been called to do, know that one of the first things they do is defend each other. One of the first things Christian soldiers do is they stand by each other.

One of the first things the person who does not want to be a fellow soldier does is he does not stand up for his pastor-teacher. Maybe he doesn't badmouth him, but he is not willing to crawl down the throat of somebody else who badmouths the pastor-teacher to him. If you are a fellow soldier of Jesus Christ, you will not only do that for the pastor-teacher, but you will do that for other members in your army (in your local church). You will consider the reputations; you will consider the privacy; and, you will consider the person of other believers of highest sacredness in the sight of God and in your sight. If somebody tries attacking other believers in your assembly, you're going to cut them down. And I mean cut them down. You're not going to sit there grinning like a baboon who just swung from the latest banana tree and has discovered a whole new world opening up to him. But you are going to cut people down who attack your fellow soldiers.

That's soldiering. I guarantee you that if it was on a field of military combat, you wouldn't want to be out there with people that you could not expect to be ready to defend you. You wouldn't want to go into combat with somebody that you didn't think was going to shoot an enemy down if the enemy was taking a shot at you and you weren't looking. The people you want to go into combat with are the people that you can trust are going to try to take care of you as you will try to take care of them.

Now, that is axiomatic. That is a basic requirement of Christian soldiering. Soldiers take care of one another. You can see that if a pastor-teacher is blessed by God with a strong contingent of people in this way, that he has something to lean on, then his stability in the work is considerably enhanced. If he doesn't have this, he has to do a lot of chasing around and a lot of trying to pull things together. That makes his job not only harder, but it causes him not to be as effective in his understanding and preaching of the Word of God.

Of course, this could expand completely. There's no reason why the brethren shouldn't practically totally be fellow workers, and why the fellow workers shouldn't practically be totally fellow soldiers. You can see what that's going to do to your pastor-teacher. What's it going to do? It will make him stand just a little taller. Wouldn't you like to have a pastor-teacher that stands tall in the saddle like that? That's what happens because he's got a solid wall to lean on. It gives him a foundation as it gives you a foundation.

So these are not small things when Paul wrote to these people and said, "I want to tell you this Epaphroditus that you sent me–he is something else. He is not only my brother, but he is my fellow worker. You have no idea how many things I have to do here, and how hard it is for me to do them since I'm sitting in this prison house in Rome. This man–I can give him a job, and he runs it through. The next time I hear about is when he reports back to me of the completed project and what he's achieved. He's ready for the next assignment. He is a fellow worker. Furthermore, if that isn't enough, he's also my fellow soldier." Paul was saying, "This is a man I'm happy to go into spiritual combat with. This is a man I'm happy to have at my side as I face Satan and the demonic world." You can imagine what swirled around Paul in his prison room when he was sitting there writing a book of the Bible. If there's ever a time when the forces of hell are going to go screaming, that's when it's going to be.

So we have brother; fellow worker; and, fellow soldier. You might want to check your own spiritual maturity structure to see what stage of relationship you have or how many of these stages of relationships are actually built into your own life. They are connected to your spiritual maturity. As your spiritual maturity develops, these relationships to your communicator will also develop.

In verse 26, Paul says (concerning Epaphroditus), "For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness because you had heard that he had been sick." The word "for" is the word "epeide." This is a little different word than what we've been having for the word "for." We've been having usually "de" for "for." This is "epeide." It means "because." He is now introducing the reason that he's going to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi.

The reason is that "he longed for." The word "longed for" or "longed after" is "epipotheo." "Epipotheo" means "to desire greatly." Epaphroditus had a relaxed mental attitude. He had a capacity to love because he was a mature believer. The result of having this relaxed mental attitude was that he had "agape" love operating in his soul. Because he had the capacity to love, he had "phileo" love operating in his soul. This caused him to have a great desire and a longing for the people back home. This is certainly one of the characteristics of a soldier of Jesus Christ. Anybody who has ever had to serve in the military in a foreign country, and be separated for a long period of time from the people that he loved and the people that were his family back home, will understand this feeling that began to develop in the soul of Epaphroditus. What he felt toward those people created a great longing within him.

You might almost relate it somewhat to homesickness, though it's not quite that. Certainly Rome was a strange place. As far as we know, there were only two people that Epaphroditus knew in Rome–Paul and Timothy. But in any case, it was certainly a very special kind of a yearning and a longing for the people back in Philippi. This is not an uncommon feeling for soldiers. It is present tense, so this was a continual desire. It's like when a woman falls in love with a man, and she says to him, "I think about you all the time." That's what Epaphroditus was doing. That's what this word "epipotheo" means. It's active–his personal feelings. It's participle–to express a statement of fact.

In the Greek, this is made even stronger because it has another word added that you don't see in the English. I'm going to tell you about that. It has this little word "eimi." It's in the imperfect active indicative. The imperfect tense is one that we have not come up against very often. But the imperfect was the Greek way of telling you something that was happening in the past continually. You are acquainted with that tense we call the aorist tense which talks about something happening in one point of time. It just looks at it as a whole in the past. Now, imperfect comes along, and it talks about the past also, but it talks about a thing that kept going on and on, and repeatedly was taking place in the past.

The word "to be" ("eimi") is added in the Greek the word for "longing," but it's in the imperfect active indicative. This sets up a combination, a condition which in the Greek language is called a paraphrastic construction. In this case, it's a paraphrastic imperfect. Now, what a paraphrastic does is that it adds an added emphasis. It is the strongest way of saying something. When a Greek wanted to really push something hard and to stress it, he would put it in this paraphrastic construction. Paraphrastic imperfect is a very strong action. It's really saying the same thing that the plain imperfect does. The plain imperfect just calls to your attention that Epaphroditus, continually in the past, up to the time that Paul was writing this letter, Paul says, "He just thinks about you people all the time now." But he put it in a paraphrastic so he said, "I really mean that he thinks about you all the time." We have to do it by emphasis of voice and adding words, where the Greek could simply do it with a particular kind of construction.

So Paul makes it clear that these people are very dear to Epaphroditus. They are very much on his mind, and it refers to them when he says, "You all." Actually, the Greek says, "All of you."

So we may translate this as, "Because he was constantly deeply yearning for all of you." He may actually have been the pastor-teacher of that church, and therefore he may have been yearning for them as a pastor-teacher does yearn for his right congregation when he is absent from them.

Furthermore, Paul says that, "He was full of heaviness:" "He longed constantly after you and was full of heaviness." The word "full of heaviness" is the Greek word "ademoneo." "Ademoneo" means "to be troubled." As a matter of fact, it means "to be much troubled." It refers to an emotional condition within Epaphroditus. It is the word which is used to describe what Jesus Christ felt in the Garden of Gethsemane. You can read about that in Matthew 26:37 and in Mark 14:33. The identical emotion that Epaphroditus was going through was the emotion that Christ experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the cross and faced the fact that He, the sinless Son of God, was going to have the sins of the world poured out upon Him. He recoiled from that with such a strong reaction that it created a kind of a depression. We might almost describe this as a depressed condition.

Again, the grammar is one of these paraphrastics. He again throws in the little Greek word "eime" in the imperfect tense, and he combines it with "ademoneo," and you come up with a paraphrastic imperfect. So, again, it is making a stress upon the fact that Epaphroditus was really down in the mouth now. He was really emotionally depressed over his absence from the people in Philippi.

**Illness**

Then we have the word "because." Why was he in this state? The Greek word is "dioti." "Dioti" simply means "on account of this." It introduces the reason for the anxiety that possessed Epaphroditus. What was it? Because information had come back to Rome from Philippi, and Epaphroditus had gotten the word on a certain condition that was existing back in Philippi. "You had heard." The word had come back to Rome that the people in Philippi had heard that Epaphroditus had fallen into a very serious illness. "You had heard" is the Greek word "akouo." It is aorist tense, active, indicative. Epaphroditus knew the Philippian Christians. He knew that they would feel responsible for having sent him on a mission which caused him somehow to fall into an illness where his very life was threatened.

In other words, Epaphroditus became sick in Rome. Somebody from Rome, who was traveling back to Philippi, carried the word back. When he got to Philippi, naturally everybody said, "Did you see Epaphroditus?" He would have replied, "Yes." They would have said, "How is he?" He would have had to report, "I've got some bad news. He is sick." They would say, "How bad?" He would reply, "Really bad." They would say, "Do you mean he might...?" He would say, "Yes, he might die."

Epaphroditus knew that these people were going to immediately be in a considerable depressed state themselves, because he had been selected as their representative (as their ambassador) to go on this commission to Rome, and the result of that appointment by them, they thought, might lead to his death. So the aorist here is the point when the word reached the people in Philippi. It is active. They had personally received the word about his illness. It is indicative. It is a statement of fact.

What they heard is introduced by the word "that" ("hoti"): "That he had been sick." The word for "sick" is "astheneo." "Astheneo" comes from two Greek words. First, it comes from this "a," which you have learned is the Greek way of putting a negative. It means no. And "sthenos" means "strength." So what the word "astheneo" means is "no strength," or "feeble." From this we get the idea of "sick." They got the word back that Epaphroditus was flat on his back in an enfeebled condition, and very sick indeed. The aorist indicates the point at which he became sick. We don't know what his sickness was. We don't know how long he was sick. We have no idea what they were able to do about it, or how they proceeded. All this tells us is that at some point in time, in his relationships with his ministry with Paul in Rome, he became sick. It is active, and this indicates that the illness was within the body of Epaphroditus himself. Indicative is a statement of fact.

If you transport yourself back to the ancient world for a while, you will realize that it was not uncommon for people to pick up illnesses. Sanitation was a horrendous thing in the ancient world. They didn't have indoor toilets, and, consequently, they had chamber pots. All of the sewage that was collected during the evening and the night was very simply disposed of by opening the door and heaving it out into the street, and sometimes from an upstairs room. If you happen to be going to a wedding, having just put on your usher's suit, and they happened to open the upper window to empty the pots, everybody would know you were around when you arrived. You just walked through the streets, and this kind of lack of sanitation was everywhere.

There are some countries of the world that you can travel in today whose sanitation is still at that kind of crude level. You won't travel there very long, and eat there very long, before you are aware that you have picked up something. You will readily have the evidences of it. So Epaphroditus lived in a world that was just the easiest place in the world to pick up an illness. Furthermore, for many illnesses and for many physical breakdowns that a person had, there was no solution but death.

It was not uncommon, even as late as the 19th century, for a doctor to be able to analyze the problem that a person had. They would know what his internal situation was. They might examine a man who was fantastically sick, and discover that he had a ruptured spleen. What would they do for him? Surgery wasn't possible. It was before the days of surgery. All they could do was maybe give him something in the way of a drug to ease his pain, and send him home literally to die.

This was common practice in the ancient world. There was nothing else they could do. People could contact certain diseases or certain physical breakdowns, and there was nothing they could do but send them home to die. For that reason, the average lifespan in the ancient world was 35 or 40 years. If you hit 40 years, you were doing good. The infant mortality rate was obviously fabulous. It was unbelievable. That's why it took the world so long to come to where it had a billion people in it. Centuries went by before there were even a billion people on the face of the earth.

So for a person in the New Testament times, and at this time when Epaphroditus was sick, the only way a person could get well, by and large, was just by the sheer physical stamina that he had himself. He just had a physical body and a physical constitution that was capable of overcoming whatever it was he had contracted in the course of moving through a very unsanitary New Testament world.

So when the word got back that Epaphroditus was sick, and that he was very sick, this was the thing that they took with considerably more alarm than we might today. This was because they knew that in those times, if a person really got desperately sick, his chances of recovery were very small. The word got back that Epaphroditus was sick, and Paul indicates a little later how sick he was: "Right to the point of death." Paul said, "I thought he was gone." That's how sick Epaphroditus was.

So when Epaphroditus, then, having recovered from his illness, receives another visitor from Philippi, and he inquires on how things are back home, he said, "They're very much concerned about you, Epaphroditus. They've heard that your sickness was of a grievous nature, and that you had been at death's door, and the whole congregation back in Philippi is extremely distressed and in great anxiety over this matter." This tells us something about the congregation back in Philippi. It tells us that this must have been a congregation which had a very large number of fellow workers and a fellow soldiers. They were, therefore, much concerned for what was happening to Epaphroditus, the man whom they had commissioned for this journey.

**Christians to Imitate**

So this is the third man in the series of people that we should imitate in Christian service. Imitate Paul, if necessary, with your life. Few of us are called upon to do that, at least up to now. Imitate Timothy with being willing to serve without having to be recognized, and to be very much concerned for the spiritual well-being of other people without looking for some credit in the process of doing it. Imitate Epaphroditus such that you use your physical capacities even to the point of becoming sick in the process, which certainly is not what the Lord is asking us to do. But the point is that you have physical capacities to be used for the Lord's work. It takes physical capacities. Don't wait until you're all drained out, and then turn to try to do something for the Lord.

If you've got some project around Berean Memorial church that you've been intending to get through for a long time; that you've been wanting to get done; and, that's something that needed to be put into operation, and you find that you haven't done it, you may discover, as you think about it, that the reason you haven't gotten to it is that every time you think about it, you're dog tired. You're just shot. You're just so exhausted that you can't get around to it. I would suggest that some morning you wake up and you give that project your first thought. You start thinking about that first. You just remember Epaphroditus, and say, "He gave his best to the Lord, not his leftover tattered, shattered, worn-out capacities when everything else was taken care of." Then I'll promise you, you will be very pleased with how much you get done in the Lord's work. You will find that you have moved from just being a brother to indeed being a fellow worker. Then the Lord may even honor you, and tap you for the soldier's role. You will discover that you have now entered the real battle where the enemy, his majesty the devil and his troops (the demons) are trying to cut you out of carrying the soldier's role.

I hope that doesn't happen to you. I hope that you will be a brother; you will be a fellow worker; and, you will be a soldier in the finest tradition of the Berean ministry.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

[**Back to the Advanced Bible Doctrine (Philippians) index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/philippiansdanish.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)