

# *Philippians 2:25-30*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007*

## **How can we live the Christian life? Epaphroditus' example**

### **Prayer**

Father, again we praise You for an opportunity to come together, to worship You. And You said in Your Word that true worshippers worship You in spirit and in truth. Father, we desire our worship time, whether it be through the preaching, singing, whatever it is, to be led by Your Spirit. And Father we desire everything to be in accordance with Your truth. Father, as we look into Your Word today, we ask You to work in our hearts. Help us to be those who do what You say. I pray that no one here will hear what You've said and walk out and forget, but that You'll use Your Word to prompt us and lead us and guide us into what You desire us to do. We pray Your Word would dwell richly in us today, that it would convict us, and that it would reprove us and then correct us, Lord God, and then train us, so that we would for Your glory be adequate, equipped for every good work. Thank You for this time. May You be greatly glorified in it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Sermon**

Well I don't know if you're familiar, there is a book out, and it's pretty thick, and it's got a lot of pictures. I'm not much of a reader, so the picture ones are pretty good for me. It's called *More Than Conquerors*. It has a lot of stuff about those in the faith who did great and mighty things for God. And unfortunately within that book, it's just our view of those who are more than conquerors. And certainly these people were faithful to the Lord, but the things that they did were evident to everyone. What I think we're going to see today as we look at Epaphroditus that the service and the everyday actions of taking care of the needs of the body are just as important. And we're going to see that even though Epaphroditus may not have been in the book *More Than Conquerors*, God has placed his example in Scripture. And we'll see today that God tells us through the Apostle Paul to hold men up like him in high esteem. And we're going to take a look today at an example of faith to follow, as we look at the life of Epaphroditus, as explained through the Apostle Paul.

Would you turn your Bibles with me to Philippians chapter 2? And we've seen the Apostle Paul has so graciously written a church that he loves very dearly. A church that he cares for very deeply. A church that loves him. And Paul is confident that the work that God began in them, the work of salvation, will be completed. And Paul shared his example of a sacrificial life, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." And we saw the Apostle Paul exhorting these Philippians to have the same mindset, a mindset that sees others as more important than themselves, a mindset of Christ. And we have been given the example to follow. "Have this mind (or this attitude) which was in Christ Jesus." The attitude of humility. "Although He was in the form of God, He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped." But He humbled Himself by becoming obedient, took on the form of a man, and became obedient to the point of death.

We've seen some examples of living out life in a humble, obedient fashion, working out your salvation with fear and trembling. The obedience that is required of those who follow Jesus Christ, and is enabled

# Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

by His Spirit. Instead of grumbling and complaining about circumstances, we were commanded “All things to do without complaining and grumbling.” And then we saw three examples, basically, the example of Paul. In the midst of his difficulties, he didn’t complain at all. He trusted the Lord. He saw everything as an opportunity to magnify Christ.

And then we saw last week the example of Timothy, that he was single-minded, focused on the things of Christ. Paul made this amazing statement that he had no one else of like mind. Everyone else was about their own things and not the things of Christ. Now we saw that Timothy was single-minded, that he was seasoned – he allowed God to use his trials, those trials upon him, to forge Christ-likeness in his life. He didn’t complain. And we saw that he was submissive, serving Christ. That he served Paul as a co-laborer, but he served Paul like a son serves a father. And we see that Timothy was an example of working out our salvation with fear and trembling (not complaining), that God was using those two men and their examples we should follow. Now you might be saying, “Ok I’m not an apostle, and we don’t have apostles anymore. Well, I’m not a pastor-teacher like Timothy. Those are great examples but these don’t apply to me.” And God in His sovereignty gives us today the example of Epaphroditus, which applies to everybody.

So would you turn your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2, and we’re going to look, beginning at verse 25.

***<sup>25</sup> But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, <sup>26</sup> because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup> For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. <sup>29</sup> Therefore, receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard <sup>30</sup> because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. [Philippians 2:25-30]***

“Hold men like him in high regard.” We’re going to see that Epaphroditus was not some risk taker for Christ, but a faithful servant who risked his life for Christ. And he didn’t do it in some magnificent, fantastic way that we would write about. It was simply through faithful service that he risked his life.

Now who is Epaphroditus? Well first of all, his name is a common name, a common Greek name. It was after the Greek god of Aphrodite. And his name was named after Aphrodite, and it means “Favorite of Aphrodite.” And basically from his name, we can gather that his parents were pagans as they named him Epaphroditus. But ultimately we know that Epaphroditus came to faith in Jesus Christ. From this passage that we’re going to look at today and in chapter 4, it is apparent that the Ephesians had sent Epaphroditus to deliver a gift to the Apostle Paul, and also to minister to his needs. Let’s skip over a little bit to chapter 4, and we’re going to read in verse 14.

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

**<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, you (He's speaking to the Philippians.) have done well to share with me in my affliction. <sup>15</sup> And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; <sup>16</sup> for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. <sup>18</sup> But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 4:14-19]**

Epaphroditus was chosen by the Philippian church to bring a financial gift to the Apostle Paul to take care of Paul's needs. And remember Paul was in chains in Rome, he is under house arrest 24/7. And Epaphroditus was chosen by them to deliver this gift. And we see back in chapter 2:25 he says, "Your messenger and minister to my need." He says that Epaphroditus was a messenger for the Philippians, to bring obviously the financial gift and to share their greetings and their concerns obviously, and also to minister to Paul's needs.

Well what can we gather about Epaphroditus through these passages? First of all, obviously, Epaphroditus was a trusted envoy. He was entrusted with delivering probably a very large financial gift, some 1,500 miles by land and sea. And he must have been a person that you could trust. Someone that the church could say, "You deliver this for us." He must have been a man of godly character. It's quite obvious that the Philippians wouldn't send just anyone to minister to the Apostle Paul. They're not going to send anyone who was out for their own focus or reasons. They sent Epaphroditus, who was obviously probably a man of godly character. And Epaphroditus as we will see was a selfless servant. He left the comforts of home, his friends, possibly family, and the fellowship of his beloved church in Philippi to serve Christ by meeting the physical needs of the Apostle Paul.

And I think Epaphroditus was possibly courageous also in Christ. He took great risk. To minister to the Apostle Paul in this situation was to place yourself in a situation as an enemy of Rome. And quite possibly anyone and everyone who came to the Apostle Paul possibly could have been arrested also and jailed along with Paul. So it's evident that Epaphroditus was trusted, he was a man of godly character, he was a selfless servant, and I believe he was courageous.

So it's quite apparent that Epaphroditus was a pagan, and he came to Christ. And he matured to the point that we see these Christ-like characteristics in him. And we see this in our passage today, that like the Thessalonians he turned to God from idols, to serve the one and only true living God. A true conversion in Epaphroditus.

So what can we learn about him? What does Paul say about him in our text today? First of all, he was a faithful servant. Verse 25,

# Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

***25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need. [Philippians 2:25]***

Now this might have been a shock to the Philippians. Was Epaphroditus still sick? How could he make it back? Had he failed in serving Paul, and Paul is sending him back? “Epaphroditus, you blew it, you’re going back. I don’t need you.” Was he home sick? Paul is writing to affirm really the reason why he sends Epaphroditus and to lay the foundation for their greeting of him, because as you know we misunderstand one another. We make presumptions. We think about people in certain ways, and it’s not true. And Paul is alleviating those presumptions by sharing the reasons why he is sending Epaphroditus back.

Now before we see the reasons why, we’ll see some character qualifications or characteristics of Epaphroditus. And the first one we see out of the five is that he was a brother in the faith. “But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother...” Well were Paul and Epaphroditus related together physically? No they weren’t. This term “my brother” means “from the same womb” but that’s not what he’s saying. Paul is affirming that both Epaphroditus and Paul were born again into the family of God. ***3 Blessed be the God and Father who according to His great mercy has called us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. [1 Peter 1:3]*** We are born into earthly families in our sin, but when we place our faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in Him alone for salvation, we are born into the family of God. That is our new birth. We are new creations. The old things have passed away, new things have come. And the remainder of what God leaves, this fleshy body, will be redeemed. We will be resurrected also like Christ. They were both children of God, adopted into the family of God.

First John 3, John writes, ***1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. [1John 3:1]***

We are adopted into the family of God when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. And folks, this is the prerequisite to serving God. No one can serve God apart from being in His family. Paul says first of all, “My brother Epaphroditus.” He’s a brother in the faith. We are related spiritually because of Christ. The Scripture even points out that there are two fathers basically in a sense. We have God the Father, who when we are adopted into His family, we become His children. But also, Jesus told the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil.” And we see their spiritual origins of sin, and we see that Epaphroditus and Paul were of Christ. They were children and brothers in the faith. They had a common spiritual life. They were both in Christ. They were both yielded to the Lord, the head of the church.

So first of all, he says, “My brother.” Secondly he says, “But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier...” So he says fellow brother and fellow worker. Notice the humility of Paul’s description here. “Fellow worker.” He doesn’t say, “Epaphroditus is my slave.” He doesn’t say, “Epaphroditus is my gopher. He does everything I ask him to do.” Well

# Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

certainly Epaphroditus did do those things, but that's not how Paul sees him. He says, "He is a fellow worker." Paul didn't have a top-down understanding of church leadership. They were equals but with different giftedness and calling. "Fellow worker, Epaphroditus." Epaphroditus, in what God had called him to do, was just as important as Paul. He was a fellow worker. Paul and Epaphroditus rightly understood that if you are in Christ, you are Christ's. That we are not our own. We've been bought with a price. That we are all stewards of God's gifting, and there are different giftings. First Peter 4:10,

<sup>10</sup> ***As each one has received a (specific or) special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (Or multi-colored, multi-faceted grace of God.) [1 Peter 4:10]***

God gifts everyone differently when they come into the body of Christ. And Epaphroditus and Paul had different giftings, but they were both faithful, and he was a fellow worker. There was no putting someone up on a pedestal, that he's better because of that gifting or this or that. They were the same plane. Serving God with different gifts and callings. Fellow workers. Wycliffe writes,

*This term was borrowed from the workshop, stressing a spirit of comradeship. They were working alongside one another for the cause of Christ. There wasn't an envy or strife based on position or gifting. They had a common spiritual purpose, serving Christ for the furtherance of the gospel.*

Epaphroditus was a fellow worker.

Next we see he was a fellow soldier. Again verse 25, "But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier..." Well wait a second, was Paul enlisted in the army? Was Epaphroditus a soldier in a sense? No, what he's talking about is the fact that every believer is in a war. When you come to Christ, you immediately enter into a war. It is an unrelenting and fierce battle, yet it does have an end, and you are on the winning side. Paul and Epaphroditus like us were fighting the same enemies under the same commander. We know in Ephesians chapter 6 that we have a spiritual foe. Ephesians 6:10,

<sup>10</sup> ***Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.*** <sup>11</sup> ***Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*** <sup>12</sup> ***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*** <sup>13</sup> ***Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*** ***[Ephesians 6:10-13]***

We have spiritual enemies who hate Christ, who will do anything and everything to tempt us not to trust Christ, to believe what He has said and to act upon that by His Spirit, to tempt us to trust in our wisdom and understanding and our own flesh. And certainly we have the world as an enemy because if the world hates Christ, Jesus said they would hate us, and they do. The enemies are the enemies of Christ

# Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

and the Gospel, and the commander is Christ. And Epaphroditus and Paul are both fellow soldiers under the commander, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3, "Suffer hardship with me..."

It is difficult, it is not easy. It is not "Come to Christ and everything is roses." It is "Come to Christ and everything is awful" it seems like. But yet God uses those difficulties to make us like His Son and to purge and to open the way for the Gospel. And ultimately He will bring us to glory. For if you suffer with Him you will be glorified with Him. It is temporal. Where Paul could say, "I consider the sufferings of this present world nothing to be compared to the glories to follow." That's why Jesus would say, "Count the cost." It's going to cost you everything. But you will gain Christ.

One pastor writes,

*...the life of every believer is a warfare; he is always engaged in a war with sin, and Satan, and the world; and is often called to fight the fight of faith, to contend earnestly against false teachers for the faith once delivered to the saints, to stand up for it, and fast in it; and is provided for with the whole armour of God, with weapons of warfare, which are not carnal, but spiritual and mighty, being enlisted as a volunteer under the great Captain of his salvation, Jesus Christ, under whose banner he fights, and is more than a conqueror through him:*

We see that Epaphroditus was a fellow soldier. Second Timothy 2:3,

***<sup>3</sup> Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. [2 Timothy 2:3-4]***

We don't fight this fight of faith just for the person who shared the gospel with us. We fight this fight of faith for the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is He who does it through us. We stand firm in the Lord. We're all in a battle. It's a short battle, but it's a battle. And we need to realize that. It's a battle for your faith. Do you believe what God says? Are you going to trust Him no matter how you feel, no matter how things happen? "Fellow soldier."

Then we see, back to Philippians 2:25, "But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger..." We touched on this before. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church. He is their messenger. He was carrying out duties for them. He was to deliver a financial gift to Paul and to minister to his need as we will see. Again, "...who is also (end of 25) your messenger and minister to my need."

Notice Paul says Epaphroditus was "a minister to my need." And this word "minister," the word in Greek is *leitourgos*. It is where we get our regular term "liturgy." It's from *laos*, which means "Of the people," and *ergon*, which means "to work." And folks, just thinking about this word, the denominations have skewed this so far. It is not a set of rigid things we do in liturgy. Epaphroditus was a *leitourgos*, he was a minister. In the Greek culture it spoke of one performing public service. In the Old

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

Testament translation in the Greek of the Hebrew, it spoke of priestly service. In the New Testament it speaks of one who carries out God's will by serving the people. A minister. Of What? "To my need." It wasn't a liturgy of things that you did. It was service unto the Lord. Epaphroditus performed sacred, spiritual service by ministering to Paul's needs. Kenneth Wuest writes,

*...the service of Epaphroditus in ministering to the needs of Paul while the former was in Rome, was looked upon by the apostle as a ministry having as much sacredness about it as one would meet with in the ministry of the priests in the Jewish temple services.*

He's saying it was just as sacred for Epaphroditus to meet Paul's needs as it was to serve in the temple of God. You see how we warped everything? We elevate certain people as more priestly or as more whatever it is, when everything that God calls each and every believer to do is sacred service; and Epaphroditus, as we will see, is praised for that. And they are told to hold men in high esteem like him. Epaphroditus performed sacred service unto the Lord by serving the Apostle Paul.

And folks, there's been so many people just in the last week who have served me. And I praise God for you all. And I praise God for how you've served one another. That is sacred service unto the Lord when we look at others as more important than ourselves and we offer ourselves as living sacrifices. It is sacred service unto the Lord. It is sacred service to fold the bulletins, to do the coffee. Whatever things we think might be mundane! Epaphroditus was a minister, a sacred servant, "to my need," Paul says. We see from this description that Epaphroditus was a faithful servant of Christ, and that his service although physical was on a spiritual plane. And I believe Epaphroditus knew what it meant to be a true disciple of Christ, giving up his own life to serve Christ. And Jesus puts it this way, Luke 9:23,

***<sup>23</sup> And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me (If you wish to follow Jesus), let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." [Luke 9:23-25]***

Jesus gives a parable about servant-hood and following Him. Luke 14:16, I'll read this for you.

***<sup>16</sup> But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; <sup>17</sup> and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' <sup>18</sup> But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' <sup>19</sup> And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' <sup>20</sup> And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' <sup>21</sup> And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' <sup>22</sup> And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' <sup>23</sup>***

# Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

**And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup> For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.' "** <sup>25</sup> **Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." [Luke 14:16-33]**

He's talking about giving up your life. If there are things that are dear to you, and you hold onto them, you can't be Christ's disciple. If you hold onto your life, you will lose it all. If you give your life to Christ, you will gain it all. And Epaphroditus who did anything and everything that Christ called him to do, and he followed Him wholeheartedly. I believe he was a faithful disciple, one who followed Christ.

And I want to ask you, do you see the mundane physical acts of service, placing others' needs above yourself, as sacred acts of worship? All these things that we do around here, all the things that help me to focus on the Word and function in the gifting that God has given me, are sacred things. However God has gifted you to serve, it is sacred service unto the Lord.

Now as we continue, we see that this sacrificial servant Epaphroditus had a genuine concern for the brethren. Back in verse 25 of chapter 2,

**<sup>25</sup> But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, <sup>26</sup> because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup> For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. [Philippians 2:25-27]**

Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippians, and again it might have been a shock to them. So Paul explains why he is sending him back. He wanted to assure the Philippians that Epaphroditus was ok. Verse 26, <sup>26</sup> **because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. [Philippians 2:26]** Epaphroditus was continually longing for them all, and he was distressed. This word speaks of being terribly upset, deeply troubled or grieved. Why was Epaphroditus so upset and distressed? Middle of 26, "because you had heard he was sick." That he was sick.

Now remember there was no email, no FedEx, UPS, telephones. These Philippians had heard over the 1,500 mile route somehow that Epaphroditus was sick. And here we see in our text he was close to

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

death. And they were greatly concerned for their faithful servant they had sent to minister to Paul, who was about to die. And Epaphroditus was anguished because of *their* anguish. He needed to get the word to them that he was ok. And we see in this that Epaphroditus cared very much about them. He cared very much about them and their distress. So much so that he was distressed. Epaphroditus – a great example of thinking of others as more important than himself.

But God, through the Apostle Paul, wanted to let them know that he was ok. To relieve that distress because God had healed him of a deadly sickness. Verse 26, <sup>26</sup> ***because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*** <sup>27</sup> ***For indeed he was sick to the point of death...[Philippians 2:26-27a]*** Paul explains the fact that Epaphroditus had gotten very sick. The word literally means “alongside death.” He and death were neighbors; it was very close. And Epaphroditus was on his death bed. And the Philippians were greatly concerned and Epaphroditus loved them so much that he was greatly concerned about their concern. Somehow in the process of serving the Lord by serving Paul, Epaphroditus had become deadly ill. But notice the contrast: “...but God had mercy on him.” God had mercy on him.

Folks, here the healing of Epaphroditus was a show of God’s mercy. This brings something into my mind. I think we need to be careful when we isolate one of God’s attributes to the exclusion of others. Sometimes we can have such a warped view of God’s sovereignty that we see sickness like this, “So and so has a disease, but God is sovereign. So and so is sick, but God is sovereign.” Yes, God is sovereign. But God is a merciful and gracious God and He wants to hear our prayers of concern for the body of Christ that He loves and gave His life for. And God had mercy on Epaphroditus and He healed him. Yes, God is sovereign, but God has ordained that He acts through prayer. So we need to recognize not only is God sovereign, He is gracious. Not only is God sovereign, He is gracious and loving and kind and merciful. We need to take all of His attributes together and see it in one picture rather than individually and distorted. It says in our text, “But God had mercy on him.” And we need to pray for people, that God would have mercy on them. If it’s God’s will, those who are sick might be healed. He may or may not (He is sovereign), but we still pray and we trust that He is a merciful God. God had mercy on Epaphroditus.

And now we see this mercy is extended to the Apostle Paul also. Middle of verse 27, “...and not on him only, but also on me lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.” How do you think the Apostle Paul would feel? Somebody sends somebody specifically to minister to him, and they die because they came to minister to him? He had mercy on Paul, “lest I have sorrow upon sorrow.” We see Paul’s humanity. But yet we see compassion like our Lord. You remember our Lord crying when He was told that Lazarus was dead. And obviously He would raise him from the dead. We see compassion. And we see that in the Apostle Paul. Sometimes our compassion is lacking because our eyes have been pulled off Christ. But here God had mercy on Epaphroditus and on Paul.

Therefore, because of Paul’s great concern for Epaphroditus, he’s going to do something. He’s going to send him back. Verse 28, <sup>28</sup> ***Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.*** [Philippians 2:28] Paul doesn’t

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

mince words. He doesn't gloss over and spiritualize what he says. He says what he means. He speaks the truth in love, and we see a view into the heart of the Apostle Paul here. "Therefore, because of his great sickness that you are so concerned about and his concern for your concern, I've sent him back all the more eagerly."

And notice, there's two more reasons why Paul sends him back. Middle of verse 28, "...in order that when you see him again you may rejoice." That they would rejoice in joy together, to see Epaphroditus healed together. A faithful servant back with them, someone they loved in Christ. John MacArthur writes,

*The problem is Paul feels bad because Epaphroditus feels bad that the Philippians feel bad. Everybody feels bad. So Paul says you've got to go because they feel bad, you feel bad...you feel bad, I feel bad...they feel bad, I feel bad. If you just go they'll feel good, you'll feel good, I'll feel good, we've got to turn it around. It's that simple. Isn't it wonderful to know that some people in the ministry are compelled by relationships rather than programs?*

You see the heart of a relationship in the body of Christ. You see love in seeing others as more important than yourself. That's this example here. Epaphroditus sees the Philippians concern as more important than himself. Paul sees the Philippians concern and Epaphroditus' concern as more important than having him minister to him. Paul is sending away Timothy. He sent away Epaphroditus—those people who are going to minister to him. He is selfless and sacrificial, and we see Epaphroditus was also.

He says, "That when you see him again and I may be less concerned about you." Straight, flat out, honest statement by the Apostle Paul. He's deeply concerned about the Philippians and this is one way to alleviate that concern as they come together and recognize and praise God that Epaphroditus is ok.

Oh that we would have the same concern for one another in the body. That we would be concerned in the context of ministry, not in our own desires. That we would be concerned. That we would make decisions as led by the Holy Spirit and by the grace and mercy of God, to see others as more important than ourselves. That we would have the heart that Christ has as we trust Him and abide in Him. John 10:11, <sup>11</sup> **"I am the good shepherd** (Jesus says); **the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.** And He talks about the hireling who leaves the sheep because he is not concerned about the sheep. Jesus is concerned about the sheep. So concerned He laid down His life for the sheep. And we are to have this mind which was in Christ Jesus. And we see it in flesh in Epaphroditus, a great example for each and every one of us.

You remember how Paul described Timothy in verse 20? Looking back a little bit, <sup>20</sup> **For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare, for they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ. [Philippians 2:20]** Folks, that is what gets in the way. If you want to know why you don't have such a great concern for people, it's because your interests are elevated. Your life, the things of you are elevated above the things of Christ, as revealed in the Word of God. And I

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

want to ask you, if this Scripture was written about you - it was written about a real person Epaphroditus, a real person Timothy, a real person Paul – if it was written about you, would you be one that God classifies as “seeks after his own things”? Or those of Christ? Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul were not that way. Timothy and Epaphroditus and Paul were concerned about the sheep and the physical condition of the sheep also and the spiritual condition. And these are the interests of Christ.

I want to ask you, do you seek after your interests or those revealed in the Word of God? See, if you seek after your interests then you don't need to trust God. If you seek after the interests of Christ, then you need to trust God to take care of your stuff. It's by faith. And folks, as I shared last week, the modern seeker church teaches the body of Christ to seek after their own interests rather than to be selfless servants, faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, willing as we will see to expend their energy for Christ, looking forward to the reward. Let's make a decision to be like these godly men, focused on the things of Christ. Folks, concern for the sheep is not just a pastoral thing. “Let the pastor watch over the flock.” We see Epaphroditus greatly concerned about the Philippians and he was just a servant. And when I say “just a servant,” that's from our viewpoint. Not from God's viewpoint. As we will see, we are to hold men like him in high esteem.

So what can we learn about this example? He was a selfless servant willing to go anywhere and do anything for Christ. He didn't have his own agenda. He was following the Lord Jesus Christ. He had a genuine concern for the brethren and lastly, we'll see he was a sacrificial servant. That he risked his life to serve Christ. I'm going to go back to 25 and we're going to read through the whole passage.

***<sup>25</sup> But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need (What a wonderful introduction by the way.), <sup>26</sup> because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup> For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. <sup>29</sup> Therefore, receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard <sup>30</sup> because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. [Philippians 2:25-30]***

Because of Epaphroditus' great concern for the Philippians and Paul's great concern for the Philippians, and Epaphroditus' great concern and all the concern for each other – Paul sent him back. And now we have a command from the Apostle Paul on how the Philippians are to receive Epaphroditus. Are they to receive him like, “He failed. He's not staying as long as we had planned. We had planned a two year mission trip, and Epaphroditus is coming home early. Something is wrong.” How are they supposed to receive Epaphroditus? “Therefore, receive him in the Lord with all joy.” Do they receive him as someone who failed to accomplish the mission that they had sent out? No. “Receive him in the Lord. In the context of your relationship with Jesus Christ, the way the Lord would receive him through you, receive him in the Lord. Don't let your flesh drive how you receive Epaphroditus. Receive him in the

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

Lord with all joy. Rejoice. Rejoice.” They are to rejoice when he gets back and not to be saddened. They’re not to be saddened to think he didn’t complete it. “Our agenda didn’t go the way we thought.” They are to rejoice. And folks, things don’t go the way we plan it. God changes those things. They are to rejoice.

Next we have another command. <sup>29</sup> **Therefore, receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard. [Philippians 2:29]** Present tense: “Continually be holding men like him in high regard.” The word translated means “highly prized” or “precious.” It’s spoken of Jesus in 1 Peter chapter 2, **And coming to Him** (speaking of Jesus) **as a living stone, rejected by men but choice and precious in the sight of God. [1 Peter 2:4a]** “Hold men like him as precious and in high regard.” Why? Simply because he almost died for the work of Christ. Verse 30, <sup>30</sup> **because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. [Philippians 2:30]**

The Apostle Paul understood this. The Apostle Paul came close to death many times serving Christ. And he saw that “death works in us and life in you,” meaning that as we are close to death, as we are depending on Christ alone, the life of Christ is manifest around those He has us minister to. So “death works in us but life in you.” “Hold him in high regard.”

Folks, there’s some bogus theology in the church these days, and I want to say what it is. “God, family, ministry.” Hierarchy. Folks, there’s no hierarchy because you can’t separate the three. They’re all together. What do I mean by that? If we serve Christ by putting God first, His work and our family will be equally important. They will all be on the same level. It’s not, “We’re not going to do one because of this one or that one.”

There’s some other bogus theology also, that we’re not to spend all our energy for the work of Christ, “You might burn out. You need to save yourself so you don’t burn out.” Is it wrong to spend our energy for the work of Christ? No. Epaphroditus gave it all, to the point of death. This is a hard one to come to. He says, “Hold men like him in high esteem” – why? – “because he almost died, risking his life...” And we’re going to see that word “risking” – *parabolanoi* – means “to roll the dice.” He gambled his life to serve Christ. Is that foolish? No, not when Christ is driving that. Folks, we need to put the Lord first. When we do that all else will fall into place, i.e. our family, work, ministry. We serve the Lord. We put Him first and all those other things will be in their right place. Not on the level of hierarchy that we have ordained from some so called Christian philosophy that’s not in the Bible. Paul says, “Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete that which was deficient in your service.”

As I said, the word “risk” – *parabulamai* – means “to roll the dice,” it means “to gamble.” He gambled his life for the work of Christ. He exposed himself to danger for Christ. Is that foolish? It is when you do it in your own will and your own strength and your own power. It’s terribly foolish! But when the Lord Jesus Christ is compelling you to serve Him in such a manner that your life is at risk, it’s honorable. “Hold men like him in high esteem.”

## Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

Folks, there are not many Epaphroditus's these days. There are many who will risk their life for Christian causes but not many who will risk their life and their energy for serving somebody. Epaphroditus was just serving Paul. On our scale it was small potatoes. But totally different on God's scale. "Hold men like him in high regard." I want to ask you, are you willing to be an Epaphroditus? Give up your life and will for Jesus Christ? Expend your energy? Paul says, "For we labor (*agonizomai*) and strive, yet not I but the Lord through us." Are you willing to expend your energy? In the capacity that God has gifted you to serve Him. If so, there will be great struggle and great reward. You got to count the cost. It's going to cost you everything to follow Christ, but you gain everything.

Paul said, "He was risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me." Epaphroditus was completing the service that the Philippians were compelled to serve Paul. And we are compelled by the Word of God to be serving one another. And Epaphroditus was completing that service – "what was deficient in your service to me." And folks, if we do not serve one another as led by Christ, we are deficient and we are lacking and we are short-changing the body of Christ. We owe it to serve one another. God serving through us because God has commanded us to do so, to think of others as more important than ourselves. First Peter 4:10, as I shared earlier, <sup>10</sup>***As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. [1 Peter 4:10]*** There's a stewardship.

And folks, some of you are deficient in your service to the body of Christ. Don't feel guilty. Don't moan and groan about it. Confess it. Be forgiven. And ask the Lord how you could serve. Don't step out and do some serving program on your own. See how you're gifted in the Lord, trust the Lord and ask Him how you can see others around you as more important than yourself. There's so many little things that God would be prompting us to do for one another. Epaphroditus was a minister to Paul's need. Very important.

Now remember, Epaphroditus is an example of humility, exemplifying the mindset of Christ, thinking of others as more important than himself. And he came close to the point of death doing this. And what's the result going to be? Everyone's going to rejoice. "Rejoice when he comes back." Folks, I praise God in the last few weeks, I've seen examples of selfless, humble, obedient service to the Lord as people have helped me in many different ways. People know I have a lot on my plate, and there's a lot of physical things to do and people have helped. And I just appreciate that. I'm so thankful for that. And those who have helped me haven't complained and grumbled, which is the enemy of serving Christ. They've been obedient. And it's been a blessing to me. And I pray that we are blessed by the obedient service of one another for the cause of Christ. God has given us three examples that cover three spheres of service. The Apostle Paul – no more apostles – the Apostle Paul. Pastor and teacher – the shepherd Timothy. And the servant Epaphroditus.

Folks, are we going to be a faithful church that serves the Lord Jesus Christ no matter what, sets our agenda aside and says "Not my will but Thy will be done"? No matter what category it is, "Not my will but Thy will be done." Are we going to be *leitourgos*, are we going to be ministers performing sacred service of the needs that God has ordained or met? I want to ask you, do you see the mundane tasks

# Philippians 2:25-30

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/22/2007

that we call mundane as God-ordained? As serving the Lord in sacred service? I hope you do. "Hold men like him in high regard." And we need to hold men and women in this body who are selfless, faithful servants in high regard. And if you're not, you know it in your heart. Confess it and ask the Lord to help you be obedient. Say, "I'm sorry I haven't obeyed You. I've been about my own stuff and I'm sorry." If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive them and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Not many Epaphroditus's these days. I pray that this body would be full of them. Are you willing to be like him? Are you willing to give up your life for Christ? Are you willing to expend your energy serving Christ by serving His people? It means you've got to set your own agenda on the back burner and let it go. What an example to follow. A brother in Christ, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, one who did sacred service, meeting the needs of others. Are you being obedient, seeing others as more important than yourself? I pray that that would be on our hearts.

***<sup>23</sup> And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. [Luke 9:23]"***

## Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You that You have declared that we should hold men like Epaphroditus in high regard because he came close to death in serving You. He risked his life, he gambled his life, Lord God. And Father, Your servant Paul said in Acts to the Ephesian elders, he said that he didn't consider his life as any account dear to himself, that he might finish the course, the ministry that he receive from You. Father, I pray we would be like that. That we would not consider our physical life or the things of our life or our agendas as dear to ourselves. That we may finish the course that You have laid for us. Thank You for Your Word, thank You for this example. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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