

## Philippians 2:25-30

The Apostle Paul began Philippians chapter 2 with the ultimate, divine illustration of humility: the humility and obedience of Jesus Christ. Paul then encouraged the church to demonstrate the same attitude of self-sacrifice (vs. 5-8).

Paul went on to introduce us to the humility of Timothy, a man who was passionate in seeking the interests of others instead of his own. Paul concludes the subject of humility, closing with another example of humility – Epaphroditus.

### 1. His Reputation (Vs. 25)

**A. Brother** – Paul uses several terms that describe the kind of godly reputation for which Epaphroditus was known. Paul calls Epaphroditus, “... *my brother*.” This kind of comradery was unknown in Paul’s world. It would have been out of the ordinary to a first century audience.

At one point in his life, as an unconverted, proud Pharisee, the Apostle Paul would have referred to Epaphroditus as a Gentile dog. Now ... Paul is calling him, “... *my brother*.”

Through the gospel of Jesus Christ men and women of every race, every background, and every strata of society have converted and been transformed by faith in Jesus Christ.

**B. Fellow Worker** – The term “fellow worker” is “*sunergos*” which gives us our word, synergy. Synergy means that two elements combine energy toward a common goal and is greater than what the two elements could accomplish separately. What Paul and Epaphroditus could do together is greater than what either one of them could do alone.

Paul will use this word to describe all believers as “... *fellow workers with God*...” (*1 Corinthians 3:9*) we are working in synergy with God.

All church members should be working with the same energy toward the same goal, in a close personal relationship with all of the other members.

**Application:** – What specifically am I doing on a regular basis that enables our church to work with the same energy toward the same goal? How much time does this really involve? What more can I do?

**C. Fellow Soldier** – Paul refers to this man in verse 25 as his “*fellow soldier*.” The word Paul uses here for soldier (*stratiotes*) is the same word to describe the Roman soldiers to whom he happens to be chained at the wrist.

It is as if Paul is saying, “I am bound to these Roman soldiers by chains of iron, but I praise God that I’m bound to a loyal, faithful soldier by chains of gospel mission and family love.”

### 2. His Responsibilities:

Verse 25b. “... *your messenger*” can be translated, “*He was also your messenger*.” The Greek word “messenger” come from the word “apostle” “*apostolos*.”

The word is used more broadly at times to refer to someone sent as an envoy or sent on a special commission. (*Acts 14:14; 2 Corinthians 8:23*)

The Greek word “minister” (*leitourgos*) was a person in the ancient days of the Greek city-states who loved their city so much that at their own expense, they supported great civic events.

These ministers were revered (*leitourgoi*) in their generation. Paul is effectively saying, the man who returns with this letter to you happens to be a choice minister of God’s grace to my needs.

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### 3. His Character (Vs. 26-27)

Verse 27, “*For indeed he was sick to the point of death.*” He was literally at death’s door. His sickness greatly distressed Epaphroditus because he didn’t want those at Philippi to worry about him.

Verse 30 where Paul again writes, “... *he came close to death for the work of Christ.*” Literally translated, “because of the work of Christ.”

Epaphroditus’ sickness is one more evidence that Paul is, for a lack of a better word, fading in his temporary apostolic power to indiscriminately heal. It was the miraculous power of these early apostles which validated the gospel. However, as the gospel message spread there were changes in the occurrences of miracles. **Hebrews 2:4**, “*the era of miraculous apostolic sign gifts is nearly over.*” The focus is God-centered; there is no apostolic miracle of healing.

Verse 27b “*but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.*” This could be paraphrased to read, “so that I would not have wave upon wave of grief.” Paul is teaching transparency and saying: If Epaphroditus dies, it will bring me such incredible sorrow; it will be one wave after another of grief in my heart.

In **Philippians 1:21** Paul stated, “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.” Paul also said with perfect spiritual balance and wisdom, “*We sorrow, yet not as those without hope.*” (**1 Thessalonians 2:14**). Because of the gospel, we understand that we haven’t lost those who have died, we’ve just temporarily lost contact with them. For now Paul writes, “I’m praising God that sorrow wasn’t increased, God had mercy to extend the life of my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.”

### 4. His Reward (Vs. 28-30)

Verse 29, “*Receive him then in the Lord with all joy.*” Paul, in a metaphorical way, pulls back the curtain on all our future glory when every believer comes home.

Vs. 29b-30, “... *and hold such men in esteem because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.*”

This could also be translated, “*and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.*”

Paul writes, Epaphroditus *risked his life* to come to me. The Greek word Paul uses here for “*risking his life*” (*parabolani*) means to run into a hazard, or to not consider a danger in regards to one’s own life.

This word was also used to describe merchants who risked their lives to make their fortunes, or to gamble or risk. Paul is giving Epaphroditus the highest commendation, he is one of the *parabolani*; he is one who gambled his life for the sake of the gospel. He risked everything for Christ.

**Application** – In America today we do not risk everything for Christ as others do in some parts of the world. So we must ask ourselves, “Since I have not experienced any real risk in serving Christ, what exhaustive efforts can I take for the gospel and the cause of Christ? When specifically will I initiate these efforts?”