



Following the upward call through Philippians ...

## About Epaphroditus

Sometimes it is hard to understand what the Lord has planned and what specifics He has in motion. Because He is the ultimate great general, He clearly has a strategy for prosecuting His warfare against the prince of darkness and his minions, as demonstrated throughout the inspired record. But His strategy has to be one which operates from before the foundation of the world until Christ returns and the world burns. Hence a Christian could be being used at any point in his earthly sojourn for the execution of a tactic which will not be carried out in his lifetime. Those early saints, for example, suffered

greatly for the cause of the gospel so that it could be clear they had no earthly gain from believing that Jesus is the Christ; they instead went to their deaths as a demonstration to future generations that they really believed the testimony and the verifying signs of the first century that Jesus was risen from the dead. This is the stratagem the Lord has used to cut the legs from under the religion of Islam, which progressed only because it was of earthly value for new adherents to convert to that belief to avoid being decapitated. The All Wise used the first century church to accomplish victories that would be executed hundreds or even two thousand years following their passage to Paradise.

- **Epaphroditus** — Epaphroditus was sent by the congregation at Philippi to assist Paul in his and his team's efforts. But Paul was sending him back to Philippi with this letter. After describing his intent to send Timothy soon, and his own arrival later, the apostle states, "But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick" (Philippians 2:25,26). Paul has nothing but praise for this man, a dedicated servant of the Lord, describing him as his "brother and fellow soldier." He was also trusted by the congregation at Philippi, representing them as "your messenger and minister to my need." He was clearly a demonstration of what a good Christian man should be.

- **Sickness** — One of the reasons for sending Epaphroditus immediately was Epaphroditus' own concern for the Philippian brethren. "He was longing for you all," Paul observes, "and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 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 2:26,27). Epaphroditus was sent to assist Paul, and he was greatly concerned when the brethren heard that he was sick, and would therefore be unable to carry out his mission. Thus he desired to go back, and would be the one carrying this epistle to the brethren.

- **No healing?** — Here is the apostle Paul, whose ability to heal — along with exhibiting all the other gifts of the Spirit — was well-known, and yet he does not heal Epaphroditus. This man was a dedicated Christian, who "came close to death for the work of Christ," and one about whom Paul would have had "sorrow upon sorrow" should he have passed away. So why wasn't he healed? Epaphroditus' case establishes that the purpose of healing was not simply to heal the sick among mankind, but to be used to buttress the testimony that Jesus was risen from the dead.

Epaphroditus' usefulness to Paul, his ability to be a "messenger and minister" to assist Paul in his work, and his sickness were all orchestrated by God for His purposes. One of those would be the communication to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church that the apostles such as Paul did not always heal all sickness among them. Rather, the miracles were accomplished in the presence of the unbelievers, that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, as Paul explained to the church in Corinth: "My message ... [was] in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5).

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