

*I press on
toward the goal to
win the prize for
which God has
called me
heavenward
in Christ
Jesus.*

Philippians 3:14

Following the upward call through Philippians ...

More on Epaphroditus

The spread of the gospel was of the highest importance among the saints of the first century. Hence it was that the congregation at Philippi was willing to send Epaphroditus to assist Paul in getting the gospel preached "in all creation under heaven." This man, a "fellow worker and fellow soldier," was eminently qualified to provide a high level of assistance to Paul, apparently capable of carrying a teaching and preaching load. But not all things work out as the mind of man plans; Epaphroditus fell sick, and Paul was not in a position to heal him. Epaphroditus ended up longing to return

to Philippi, and was "distressed" about the Philippian brethren hearing of his sickness and apparent failure to carry out what he was sent for.

- **Being sent** — Much earlier in Paul's preaching, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and went back to Jerusalem. So, on the second missionary journey, when Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along, Paul absolutely refused. But here, in the case of Epaphroditus, who was unable to carry out his mission because of sickness, Paul has a different perspective. "Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly," comments the apostle, "that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you" (Philippians 2:28). Paul is backing the reputation of Epaphroditus all the way, and uses the word "eagerly" in regard to his willingness to understand Epaphroditus' desire to return. He furthermore looks forward to the reunion of the brethren with the survivor of a near deadly sickness, knowing that the Philippians will rejoice at his happy return. Paul superadds the comment that he will be less concerned about the Philippians upon Epaphroditus' return to them, clearly establishing his high regard for this fellow worker.

- **High regard** — It is easy to find fault in others — real or imagined! Epaphroditus was distressed that the brethren in Philippi heard that he was sick; there may have been those who were looking for an opportunity to criticize him. But the apostle Paul takes the high ground, sending Epaphroditus back as a trusted messenger. "Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy," instructs the apostle, "and hold men like him in high regard..." (Philippians 2:29). Even though Epaphroditus was being sent back to Philippi, he was coming with high commendation from the apostle. The congregation was not to shun him, or have a tepid welcome. Rather he was to be accepted in his return "with all joy"! The apostle and the Holy Spirit further instruct that he and others like him were to be held "in high regard." Any injunction or exhortation that Epaphroditus might give was to be accorded with serious consideration.

- **Risking his life** — Paul gives one reason for holding Epaphroditus in high regard. "He came close to death for the work of Christ," the apostle adverts, "risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me" (Philippians 2:30). Because the Philippian brethren could not physically be with Paul and assist him in the distribution of the gospel, the work of Epaphroditus was regarded as filling in the gaps, or completing "what was deficient." In contracting the sickness while serving in assisting Paul, Epaphroditus was regarded as "risking his life" and "coming close to death for the work of Christ." In effect, this man of God was literally laying down his life for the sake of Christ and the brethren.

The work of Christ — saving the lost and conserving the saved — is the only work which has eternal value. Everything else will be scraped into the dustbin of history, or burned with fire at Jesus' second coming. Epaphroditus and men like him (women, too!) are to be held in high regard for what they accomplish in sacrificing themselves for the spreading of the word of God. Sometimes they come close to death for the work, sometimes they are put to death, and sometimes they just pass away. But they are to be appreciated!

Men like Epaphroditus are to be held in high regard for their work.

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