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Send Epaphroditus at Once 2: 25-30

Send Epaphroditus at once DIG: Who was Epaphroditus? If you had to give a character reference for him, what would you say? How does he model 2:1-4? Which of the Philippians problems (1:17, 2:3, 3:2, and 4:3) would he be suited to deal with? What is the difference between mercy and grace?

REFLECT: How are you like Epaphroditus? In what areas do you need to grow to be more like him? Who are some models of humility and service you can look up to today? How do they challenge you to grow? What selfless person can you honor today? When was the last time you risked anything for Messiah?

Epaphroditus' relationship to Paul was a brother, fellow worker, and a fellow soldier.

The third spiritual model after **Paul (2:17a)** and **Timothy (to see link click [Bc](#) - I Hope to Send Timothy Soon)**, is **Epaphroditus**, another coworker and protégé of **Paul's**. **He** was not an apostle or spiritual statesman like **Paul** or, as far as we know, even an elder, like **Timothy**. There is no record of any outstanding work that **he** accomplished. Nothing is known of **his** family, **his** personal background, **his** conversion, how long **he** had been a believer, or **his** specific functions in **the churches** at **Philippi**, Rome, or elsewhere.

The name **Epaphroditus** means *belonging to or favored by Aphrodite*, the Greek goddess of love (whom the Romans, and Frankie Avalon, called Venus) indicating that, like **Timothy**, **he** was probably born and educated in Greek culture. The name was common and later came to mean *loving* or *lovely*. Although **Epaphroditus** was often abbreviated to Epaphras, there is no evidence that he was the man named in **Colossians 1:7** and **4:12**. **His** level of sacrificial service to **the Lord** is especially instructive and encouraging for the believer, for whom examples of great preachers and Messianic rabbis such as **Paul** and **Timothy** may seem beyond reach. **He** exemplifies the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of **Messiah** that involves no public

acclaim, no prominence, no high office, no great talents or gifts. **He** was not a noted preacher, teacher, or leader; therefore, **his** example seems more relevant and attainable.



Because they chose **Epaphroditus** to bring their gift to **Paul** and to minister to **him** (**2:25** and **4:18**), the **Philippians** obviously held **him** in the highest regard and trusted **him** implicitly. Although **he** may not have held an official position in **their church**, they knew that **he** met **the apostle's** high moral and spiritual standards. **He** had the soul of a servant, going willingly to Rome to help **Paul** in any way he could for as long as was needed even though he understood that the situation could change overnight. If Caesar decided that **Paul** was indeed a threat to him as had been charged, he would not hesitate to execute **Epaphroditus** as well. **Epaphroditus** knew that the risk **he** was taking was real.

After stating **his** intent to send **Epaphroditus** back to **Philippi**, **Paul** gives us **five different titles** that reveal **his** character (**verse 25**), and then mentions **several reasons** for sending him back (**verses 26** through **30**).

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs (2:25 NIV). The first three titles (introduced by **my**) pertain to **Epaphroditus'** relationship to **the apostle himself**: **brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier**. The latter two (introduced by **your**) pertain to **his** relationship to **the church** at **Philippi**: **messenger, minister**.¹¹¹

Above all else, **Epaphroditus**, like all other believers, was **Paul's** spiritual **brother**, a fellow **child of God**. As we have already seen in **Philippians 1:12** and **14, 3:1** and **13, 4:1, 8**, and **21**, this is a common way that **Paul** refers to believers as siblings in the adopted family of **ADONAI**. But more than that, **the two men** had

also become **brothers** in the sense of having a profound personal affection for each other. **They** had developed an abiding friendship and camaraderie as **they** served **the Lord** together.

Second, **Epaphroditus** was **Paul's fellow worker**, emphasizing **their** common spiritual effort, in addition to **their** common spiritual life. The term **Paul** uses (Greek: *synergos*) was common in the ancient world, referring to someone who shared a similar task or trade. Of the thirteen times it is used in the B'rit Chadashah, all but one (**Third John 8**) are by **Paul**. In each instance it has the idea of an affectionate relationship, not merely that of an impersonal official relationship (**Romans 16:9** and **21; Colossians 4:11; First Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 23**). **Paul** twice specifically includes godly **women** among **his fellow workers**: **Priscilla** in **Romans 16:3**, and **Euodia** and **Syntychē**, the two godly, but quarreling, members of **the church** at **Philippi (4:2-3)**. In **First Corinthians**, he calls believers: **God's fellow workers (First Corinthians 3:9)**.

Third, **Epaphroditus** was **Paul's fellow soldier**, suggesting **their** joint struggles against common spiritual enemies. **Fellow soldier** translates the compound Greek noun *stratiotes* (used only twice in the B'rit Chadashah; cf. **Philemon 2**), which is formed from *sun* (with) and *stratiotes*, the common word for **soldier (Mt 8:9 and 28:12; John 19:2 and 23; Acts 10:7)**. Using the word figuratively, **Paul** cautioned **Timothy** to suffer hardship with **him as a good soldier of Messiah Yeshua (2 Timothy 2:3)**. **The apostle** looked on **Epaphroditus**, not as a subordinate but, in humility, as a spiritual warrior in the service of **the Lord Yeshua Messiah**.

In the second set of titles with regard to **the church** at **Philippi**, **Epaphroditus** is called **your messenger** (Greek: *apostolos*), **whom you sent to take care of my needs**. As mentioned above, the word **you** indicates **his** relationship to **the church** of **Philippi** and views **his** work from **their** perspective. **Paul** now **thought it necessary to send** back to **Philippi** the beloved **brother, fellow worker**, and **fellow soldier** **they** had so lovingly sent to **him**. *Apostolos* can refer to an ordinary **messenger**, as it clearly does here. The term is also used for the office of **apostle**, held by **the Twelve** (including **Matthias, Acts 1:21-26**) and **Paul (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1 and 19; Eph 1:1)**. **They** were **men** who had seen the risen **Lord** and were directly chosen by **Him**. In a completely unique way, **Yeshua** is **the Apostle (apostolon) and High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1)**. *Apostolos* can also refer to special **messengers** who were chosen and sent by **the churches (Acts 14:14; 2 Cor 8:23)**. Clearly **Epaphroditus** was such a **messenger**, sent to Rome by **the church** at **Philippi**.

Epaphroditus was also a **minister** (Greek: *letiourgos*) sent from **Philippi** to meet **Paul's** needs. In the B'rit Chadashah, *letiourgos* is most commonly used for service to **the Lord**. **The apostle** spoke of **himself** as a **minister of Messiah Yeshua to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest of the Gospel of God (Romans 15:16)**. The writer to the **Hebrews** calls **ADONAI's** holy angels **His ministers (Hebrews 1:7)** and even refers to **Yeshua Messiah** as a **minister in the sanctuary and in the true Tabernacle (Hebrews 8:2)**. Therefore, for **Paul** to call **Epaphroditus** a **minister** was high praise indeed. This **friend** was the most valuable gift that came to **Paul** from **Philippi** – a self-giving, tireless, sacrificial, and humble servant of the highest caliber.

So, it must have been extremely difficult for **Paul** to send back to **Philippi** this dear **brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier**. And because **the church** had sent **Epaphroditus** to stay with **the apostle** indefinitely and to serve **his** needs, **Paul** felt obligated to give **four reasons** for sending **Epaphroditus** back to **Philippi**.¹¹²

1. Epaphroditus had been longing for all of the Philippians (2:26a Greek).

It was not that **Epaphroditus** was tired of serving **Paul**. **He** wasn't afraid of the harm that might be a consequence if **he** stayed longer. Nor was **he** restless for a change of scenery. The titles that **the apostle** had given **him** show that **he** was a **fellow worker** who would never leave **his** job uncompleted and a **fellow soldier** who would never leave **his** post in the face of danger. No, **he** simply missed **his** fellow believers in **Philippi**. **Paul** uses the same Greek verb for **longing** (*epipotheo*) in **1:8** to describe **his** own desire to see **the Philippians**. It speaks of a *strong desire for something, with an implication of need*. In the Greek this verb is in the present tense, describing an ongoing or continuous desire that **Epaphroditus** had **for all the Philippians**.

2. Epaphroditus has been distressed (Greek: ademoneo) because you heard that he was sick (2:26b Greek). This strong verb means *to be deeply troubled or dismayed*. The only other occurrences in the B'rit Chadashah describe **Yeshua's** anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane as **He** contemplated **His** impending crucifixion (**Matthew 26:37** and **Mark 14:33**). This verb *describes the confused, restless, half-distracted state producing mental distress*. As a result, **Epaphroditus** may have unintentionally become distracted to the point of being less useful to **Paul**. **His** heart ached because **he** had learned that the believers in **Philippi** had **heard that he was sick** and were worried about **him**. **He** was not apprehensive about **his** own life-threatening **illness (see 2:27a)**, but rather **he** was **distressed** over **their distress!**

Those who doubt that **Paul** was imprisoned in Rome when writing this letter often use this passage to claim that the distance involved between Rome and **Philippi** makes it difficult to envision word of **Epaphroditus' sickness** getting back to **the Philippians** and then word of that concern to return back to **him** in **Rome**. In response, we should remember that despite the distance it is far from impossible that word traveled from Rome to **Philippi** and back again through people traveling for other purposes who were able to pass along news. Furthermore, it is possible that **Epaphroditus** became very **sick** on the way to Rome and sent word back to **Philippi** through someone traveling there, thus shortening both the time and distance necessary for news of **his** sickness to travel. It is also entirely likely that **Epaphroditus** was not sent alone with the financial gift, but had others from **Philippi** accompanying **him**. If so, someone from that part could have been sent back to notify **the Philippians** of **his sickness**, while **Epaphroditus** and the rest of the team continued on to Rome. Lastly, **Paul's** words here do not demand that **he** and **Epaphroditus** received word of **the Philippians'** concern; it would be a perfectly legitimate inference for **them** to conclude that **the Philippians** would be concerned without a specific message from **them** to that effect.

Now **Paul** further explains that **indeed he was sick, and almost died (2:27a NIV)**. Thus, **he** confirms what **the Philippians** had heard, and perhaps even reveals that the **sickness** was even worse than **they** had known. **Paul** doesn't tell us the nature of **the sickness**; however, the result was that **Epaphroditus almost died**. **Paul himself** was no stranger to situations that approached **death**. On one occasion **He** was beaten **to death**, the result of that near-**death** experience was **to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead** (see **Second Corinthians Aj - Our God Who Delivers Us**). Few things sharpen one's focus on what truly matters more than the prospect of facing **death** and appearing before one's **Maker**. That which seemed so important is seen to be of little or no value, and that which is eternal significance comes into sharper focus.

But God. These two words signal the great reality that changes even the most dreadful circumstance. **But God remembered Noah (Genesis 8:1); But God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20); But God raised Yeshua from the dead (Acts 2:24 and 13:30); But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Messiah - by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5). But God had mercy on Epaphroditus (2:27b NIV).** **Mercy** is different from **grace**. **Grace** is getting what you don't deserve, **mercy** is not getting what you do deserve. The cry for **mercy** is

specifically tied to **sickness** in **Psalm 6:2, 40:5**, and occurs repeatedly in **the Gospels** when people who are **sick** cry out to **Yeshua** for **mercy** (**Matthew 9:27, 16:22, 17:15, 20:30; Luke 17:13 and 18:38-39**). According to **Paul**, **Epaphroditus** is simply the latest in a long line of people who experienced **God's mercy**, in the form of healing.

In **Philippians 2:25-27 Paul** mentioned **his** good friend **Epaphroditus**, who had been very **sick**. **Paul** had previously displayed the gift of healing. Why didn't **Paul** simply heal **his** friend? Because **Paul** refused to pervert the gift by using it for **his** own ends. That would have been beyond the purpose of the gift of healing. The gift was not given to keep believers healthy. It was a sign to unbelievers to convince them that **the Gospel** was divine truth. We find a similar case in **Second Timothy 4:20**, where **Paul** mentioned that **he** had left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Why should **Paul** leave one of **his** good friends sick? Why didn't **he** heal him? Once again, because that was not the purpose of the gift of healing (cf. **1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Corinthians 12:7b**).

Epaphroditus, however, was not the sole recipient of **mercy**; for **ADONAI** showed **mercy not on him only but also to [Paul]**. The apostle's affection for **Epaphroditus** is evident as **he** ties **his** own emotional state to **Epaphroditus'** well-being. Indeed, had **God** not shown **mercy** to **Epaphroditus**, **Paul** says that **he** would have had **sorrow upon sorrow (2:27c NIV)**. Although this expression is unparalleled elsewhere, it seems to communicate the idea of overwhelming grief, an appropriate response in the face of **death** (**Genesis 42:38 and 44:29; John 16:20-22**). Even **Yeshua** wept at the tomb of **Lazarus**, despite knowing that in a few moments **He** would raise **him** from **the dead** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ia - The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah**). Being a believer does not eliminate grief at the **death** of those close to us, but it does sweeten the grief with a future hope that **death** will not have the final word (**First Thess 4:13-18**).

3. As a result of **ADONAI** showing **mercy** to **Epaphroditus** in sparing **his** life, **Paul** continues: **Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him (2:28a NIV)**. The way **Paul** expresses **himself** strongly suggests that **Epaphroditus** was carrying this letter to **the Philippians**. He had completed **his** service to **Paul** and was then returning to the congregation that sent **him**. The Greek word translated **more eager** (*spoudaios*) communicates a sense of haste and importance in sending **Epaphroditus**. **Paul** gives the impression that as soon as **Epaphroditus'** health permitted, **the apostle** sent **him** back to **Philippi**.¹¹³

4. So that you may rejoice when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety (2:28b NIV). The Philippians had not asked that **Epaphroditus** be sent back to **them**. **His** return was **Paul's** idea and was carried out solely on **his** initiative. **He** knew that **his** loss would be **their** gain. But **their** happiness in having **Epaphroditus** back in **their** fellowship would bring **Paul** relief. Such is the amazing power and reward of selfless **love**. **Paul, Epaphroditus**, and the believers in **Philippi** were indeed **of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose**, doing **nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind** regarding **one another as more important** than **themselves** and **not merely looking out for their own personal interests, but also for the interests of others (2:2-4)**.

So then, Paul encouraged **the Philippians** to **receive** (Greek: *prosdechomai*) **him in the Lord with great joy**. The root (Greek: *dechomai*) was used by **Yeshua** to describe the way **the humble**, like **childlike believers (Matthew 18:5)**, **faithful preachers of the Gospel (Matthew 10:14)**, and **the Gospel itself (Luke 8:13; cf. Acts 8:14 and 17:11)** should be **received**. *Prosdechomai* describes how **Phoebe, Paul's sister in the Lord and a servant of the church**, was to be received by **the church** in Rome (**Romans 16:1-2**).¹¹⁴ **And honor people like him. Paul** makes it clear that **he** is using **Epaphroditus** as an example of a larger principle here. Just as **ADONAI** honored **Messiah** for **His** obedience to the point of **death**, so too **the Philippians** should show honor to **Epaphroditus, for he nearly died for the work of Messiah; risking his life in order to give me the help you were not in a position to give (2:29-30 Greek)**.¹¹⁵ **Risking** translates a participial form of *paraboleuomai*, which literally means *to throw aside*. It speaks of voluntary **risking** one's welfare and thus exposing oneself to danger. It was sometimes used of gambling, so **Epaphroditus** could therefore be called *the loving gambler*. With a total disregard for **his** own welfare, **he** continually put **his** life on the line for **the work of Messiah**.

During the fourth to sixth century a brotherhood called *the Parabolani*, which means *the gamblers*, primarily in Alexandria and Constantinople, banded together to nurse the sick and bury the dead. Taking **Epaphroditus** as their model, they visited prisoners and ministered to the sick, especially those with dangerous communicable diseases whom no one else would help. They boldly proclaimed **the Gospel of Messiah** wherever they went. Perhaps **Paul** was using a word play on the name of **Epaphroditus**, which means *avored by Aphrodite*. Because she was the goddess of gambling as well as **love**, men would often cry out "**Epaphroditus**" as they cast

the dice, hoping to be favored by her. However, in stark contrast to those men. **His** life entailed much **risk**; but it was not gambling. Without reservation, **he** could sincerely testify with **Paul** that **whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them mere rubbish, so that I may gain Messiah (3:7-8 NASB).** Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus were three very different people: **Paul** was a bold and fearless leader; **Timothy** was **his** quiet and devoted protégé; and **Epaphroditus** was a diligent, behind-the-scenes worker. Yet all three manifested the most important characteristic of a godly believer . . . a life worth imitating.¹¹⁶

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise and thank **You** so much for how wisely **You** step into my life when there appears to be no way out of a hard situation. The words “**But God**” are words of comfort that signify that **You** are almighty, all-powerful and able to do immeasurably more than I can think or imagine. **Now to Him who is able to do far beyond all that we ask or imagine, by means of His power that works in us (Ephesians 3:20).** Paul’s situation of being under house arrest seemed contrary to **Your** will to preach the Good News. “**But God**” who is omniscient, knowing even the future guided wisely all that happened in **Paul’s** life, even trials and hard times to bring glory to **God (First Peter 1:7).** Help me **Lord**, to be like **Paul** when he was under house arrest and David in the wilderness, who both trusted and rejoiced in **You** despite the very hard times. **Your love, ADONAI, is in the heavens, Your faithfulness up to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Your judgments are like the great deep (Psalms 36:5-6).** In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*