

# Timothy and Epaphroditus

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Timothy and Epaphroditus were faithful fellow-workers of the apostle Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome. Timothy had served Paul in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father, and Paul looked on him as his child in the Lord – 1 Cor. 4:17.

Epaphroditus, whose name means, “lovely,” was a fellow-soldier with Paul while also a fellow-servant of the church at Philippi. He had been sent to bring bounty to Paul, and to be his constant assistant and attendant while imprisoned.

Now both men are being sent to Philippi. Timothy was being sent hopefully to bring Paul encouraging news as to the condition of the church there. Epaphroditus was sent back because he was worried about the church worrying about him when they heard he was sick.

## Paul’s Praise for Both Men

Paul said he never knew anybody like Timothy who would be genuinely concerned for their welfare. For most people, he said, sought after their own interests and not those of Christ Jesus – vs. 20-21. Timothy was a person who would worry more about the welfare of his brethren than about himself.

The Greek word translated, ‘genuinely concerned,’ is the same word Paul uses in 4:6a where he writes: “Be anxious for nothing.” It is the word, *merimna*, which means quite literally, “To draw in different directions, to distract.” It is used only in a positive sense here (2:20) and in 1 Cor. 12:25; 2 Cor. 11:28 where the concern is for someone or something other than for oneself!

Since Epaphroditus had been sent by Philippi to stay with Paul, and now he is coming back home early, some may accuse him of being a quitter or a coward. Hence, Paul gives Epaphroditus a tribute and a tremendous “welcome home.” He calls Epaphroditus your messenger and minister to my need. The word Paul uses for messenger is the same word for apostle (*apostolos*). Even though the word means, “one who is sent,” here it may suggest that Paul may rank Epaphroditus with himself and all the other apostles of Christ. Clearly, Epaphroditus was a brave man, for any man who proposes to offer himself as the personal attendant of a man awaiting trial on a capital charge is laying himself open to the very considerable risk of becoming involved in the same charge! In truth, Epaphroditus did risk his life to serve Paul.

In verse 30, Paul uses a term that is translated, “risking his life;” or, “hazarding his life.” It is the word, “*paraboleuomai*,” which means quite literally, “to throw aside” (*para*, aside, and *ballo*, to throw), hence to expose oneself to danger, to hazard one’s life. It is a gambler’s word. It means to stake everything on a toss of the dice! What Paul is

saying is that for the sake of Jesus Christ, Epaphroditus gambled with his life.

**Illustration:** In the days of the early church, there was an association of men and women call the Parabolani, the gamblers. It was their aim and object to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. In A.D. 252, a plague broke out in Carthage. The heathen threw out the bodies of their dead and fled in terror. Cyprian gathered his congregation together and set them to burying the dead and nursing the sick in the plague-stricken city. And, by so doing, the city was saved from destruction and desolation at the risk of the lives of those who helped.

**Lesson for us:** The church will always need men like Timothy who will be genuinely concerned about the welfare of others than themselves. And, the church will always need the parabolani, men like Epaphroditus who through courage and passion will always be willing to risk their own lives to serve Christ and their fellow-brothers and sisters in Christ. Can I be a Timothy or Epaphroditus? Can you be?