

regarded as a criminal. He became ill, so ill that he almost died. Paul attributes Epaphroditus' recovery to God's intervention. Jesus said:

Mark 8:35 ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

This was Epaphroditus. What other Philippian Christians did not or could not do Epaphroditus did.

This word brings its own challenge and rebuke to an easy-going Christianity which makes no stern demands, and calls for no limits of self-denying, self-effacing sacrifice (Martin)

In calling him *Gambler* Paul may have been influenced by Epaphroditus' name. Aphrodite (or Venus) was the goddess of gamblers, and whenever a Greek rolled the dice he cried *epaphroditos* meaning "favorite of Aphrodite (Venus)," hoping to be lucky in the throw of the dice because the goddess' hand was behind it. This may be the meaning behind Epaphroditus' name. He certainly gambled with his life for Christ.

The church has been blessed by many who have been willing to risk their lives. Because of them the gospel has been proclaimed to the ends of the earth and the church built and extended.

Dr. Paul Carlson was a medical missionary in the Congo. He sought to heal the most loathsome of tropical diseases as he preached Christ as the only cure for sin. For several years he worked in the midst of increasing political ferment, preaching and living the gospel in which he so wholeheartedly believed. Even when he was arrested, he continued to treat the wounds of the rebels who had captured him. Under sentence of death, he bore himself heroically and died helping another missionary over the wall to safety.

I was brought up to believe that gambling was wrong. I've never bought a lottery ticket or a raffle ticket. I've never backed a horse or played a game for money. But the story of Epaphroditus challenges me to be a gambler for Christ. Would I risk my life for Jesus as Epaphroditus did?

CONCLUSION

Illustrated letters: this passage from Paul's letter illustrates how God lives in the lives of his people. God assures us:

2 Cor 12:9 ⁹...My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.

Have you got the picture of how God lives in the lives of his people? How he lives in your life.¹

ILLUSTRATED LETTERS

1. NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Philippians 2:25–30

INTRODUCTION

Young Brian, age five, had been told the story of the "pillar-monk," Symeon the Stylite, who lived on top of a pillar. Early Monday morning he decided to imitate Symeon. He placed the kitchen stool on top of the table and climbed to his perilous perch and began his journey toward sainthood. Mother, entering the kitchen, interrupted his holy pilgrimage. "Brian, get down off that stool before you break your neck." Brian complied but went storming from the room announcing, "You can't even become a saint in your own home!"

The church at Philippi which had been founded by Paul on his second missionary journey heard that Paul was in prison in Rome. Wanting him to know that they loved him and cared, they decided to send a gift. One of their members, Epaphroditus was to take it. He was also to stay and help Paul in any way he could, and report on how things were in the church. Epaphroditus made the journey but became so ill that he almost died. Knowing that he had had to report some trouble in the church he was afraid to return lest they thought him a quitter. In one of the loveliest and most personal of all Paul's letters he assures the church at Philippi what a remarkable young man Epaphroditus was.

MESSENGER

Since Epaphroditus had been in Rome, he had become very special to Paul. What we know about Epaphroditus is what Paul says about him here. Paul held him in high esteem. He calls him his **brother**, his **co-worker** and his **fellow-soldier**. Paul considers Epaphroditus to be his equal in the work of the gospel. A fellow-soldier was one who had fought alongside. It is not just what Epaphroditus was to Paul but what he was for the Philippians, the church back home. Epaphroditus was their **messenger**. The word is *apostle*. Paul uses this word when he needs to assert his own authority. When other Christians and churches were criticizing Paul, he would tell them to remember he is an apostle. This was the title that had been given to the first disciples of Jesus – the Twelve Apostles. As long as they lived, they had the ultimate authority in the church, recognized throughout the church. Epaphroditus, the Philippians' apostle, is a messenger, but more than a messenger. He is to be regarded, like Paul and the other apostles, as one commissioned and sent out with full authority to proclaim the gospel and perform specific tasks of service. Epaphroditus was well thought of and trusted by the Philippian church. He had been entrusted with a gift for Paul. It was

¹ CCC September 4, 2011

expected that he would stay and be of help to Paul, involved in the work and probably being able to do what Paul could not do because of his imprisonment. It is men and women of the caliber of Epaphroditus that the church needs to identify and send them out to represent the church in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Gordon Maxwell, missionary to India, asked a Hindu scholar to teach him the language, the Hindu replied: "No, Sahib, I will not teach you my language. You would make me a Christian." Maxwell replied, "You misunderstand me. I am simply asking you to teach me your language." Again the Hindu responded, "No, Sahib, I will not teach you. No man can live with you and not become a Christian." Not only his words, but his very lifestyle attracted people to Christ.

MINISTER

Epaphroditus was something else. He was a **minister**. The term was used for a person in public office who thought not of his own honor, but of his duty to the city. Such a person would carry out duties at his own expense. He might meet the cost of putting on a great drama in the city theater. He would finance the training of athletes to represent the city at the games. In a time of war might pay for the fitting out of a warship and pay the crew. Such a man was a great benefactor. The word we translate as *minister* was the word used to describe such a benefactor.

The only asset Harry Truman had when he died was the house he lived in, which was in Independence, Missouri. His wife had inherited the house from her mother and father and other than their years in the White House, they lived their entire lives there. After President Eisenhower was inaugurated, Harry and Bess drove home to Missouri by themselves. There was no Secret Service following them. When offered corporate positions at large salaries, he declined, stating, "You don't want me. You want the office of the President, and that doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the American people and it's not for sale."

The term **minister** was used not only for those engaged in civic duties. The word also refers to sacred service. The word group from which it comes was used by the translators of OT into Greek for Israel's priesthood and sacrificial system. In NT it is also used to describe a priestly ministry. *Hebrews* calls Christ our Great High Priest and uses the word of his ministry in the heavenly tabernacle. It is used of Paul for his evangelistic ministry, winning the Gentiles for Christ and presenting them to God. The Philippians have sent an offering to Paul by Epaphroditus. Paul calls this gift **a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God**. Epaphroditus is such a minister. He is responsible, he knows his duty. Whether we are called to serve God in politics, in business, in church appointments, it all needs to be a priestly

work, a sacrificial work. The C16 Reformers showed how far the church had moved from the NT. One area was the priesthood. The priest was in a privileged position. He could do what the layman must not do. This was especially with the 'sacrifice of the mass'. Only the priest could offer mass which was believed to be a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Without the priest and without the mass no one could come to Christ. The Reformers spoke of '*the priesthood of all believers*'. Priestly service was not to be confined to a special person or group of people. The apostle Peter had written:

1 Pet 2:9 ⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The whole church, all the people, all Christians are the priesthood. Sometimes an individual must represent the church by performing a priestly function such as showing the love of God by presenting a sacrificial offering. This was Epaphroditus' task. A priest brings God to people and people to God. That is always the task of the church and individuals or groups from within the church acting on behalf of the church. Not every church member can go to foreign lands as a missionary. The church recognizes those whom God has called, commissions them and sends them.

GAMBLER

An interesting and unexpected description of a Christian minister.

Phil 2:29 - 30 ²⁹Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, ³⁰because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

Risking his life translates a gambling word. It means staking everything on the roll of the dice. Epaphroditus had risked his life for the sake of Christ. In the Early Church there was a group of men and women who were known as *the Gamblers*. Their job was to visit prisoners and those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. We hear of how when plague struck a city the heathen population threw out the dead bodies and then fled the city. The Christians stayed, gave burial to the dead and nursed the sick, risking their own lives. It shows that Epaphroditus was a courageous young man. He was willing to take risks, ready to play with high stakes in order to carry out the commission of the church and go and help Paul. He made a long journey from Philippi to Rome. By coming to Paul he was associating with a man in prison,