Epaphroditus

Outline

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I. Etymology of Name

A. The name is derived from the Greek Aphrodite (belonging to Aphrodite) and means “handsome, charming.”
B. It corresponds to the Latin Venustus (belonging to Venus), and was extremely common in the Roman period, appearing frequently in Greek and Latin inscriptions, sometimes in its contracted form “Epaphras.”
C. The name indicates a non-Jewish origin.
D. The name was common in both Greek and Latin forms as well as in the contracted form.
E. It was assumed by the dictator Sulla himself in writing to the Greeks (Deuwkioς Kornhwvioς Suvllaς Epafrovditoς) (Plutarch Syll. 34; compare Apian. Civ. 1.97).
F. It was used by a freedman of Augustus (Dion Cass. 51.11.13) and by a favorite of Nero, likewise a freedman (Tacitus Annals 15.55) as well as by a grammarian of Chaeroneia residing at Rome during Nero’s reign (Suidas s.v.).
G. The name was used in the preface 2 of Antiquities by Josephus who was used by a patron of literature (Antiquities Preface 2) (possibly the same with one of those already mentioned) as well as a great friend of Josephus and encouraged him (Life 76).
H. It was also used in the work of Suetonius (Domitian 14).

II. Name and Identity

A. Epaphroditus is mentioned only 2 times in Scripture (Phlp. 2:25; 4:18).
B. He is one of the 2 noblemen mentioned in Philippians 2:19-30 whom Paul trusted:
   1. Timothy (Phlp. 2:19-24).
   2. Epaphroditus (Phlp. 2:25-30).
C. Even though the contracted form of Epaphroditus is Epaphras, this is not the same person referred to in Colossians 1:7, 4:12 and Philemon 22.
D. The name is derived from the Greek Aphrodite (belonging to Aphrodite) and means “handsome, charming.”
E. It corresponds to the Latin Venustus (belonging to Venus), and was extremely common in the Roman period, appearing frequently in Greek and Latin inscriptions, sometimes in its contracted form “Epaphras.”
F. The name indicates a non-Jewish origin.
G. The name was common in both Greek and Latin forms as well as in the contracted form.
H. There is no evidence to identify him with Epaphras from Colossae.
I. He obviously was from the city of Philippi, which was located in the Roman province of Macedonia.
J. Thus, he was a Roman citizen by birth since he came from Philippi which was designated a Roman colony by Augustus and was settled veterans of the Civil War.

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III. Roman Citizen

A. Epaphroditus was a Roman citizen by virtue of the fact that he was a citizen of the city of Philippi, which was located in the Roman province of Macedonia.
B. Thus, he was a Roman citizen by birth since he came from Philippi which was designated a Roman colony by Augustus and was settled veterans of the Civil War.
C. In honor of this victory Philippi was made a Roman colony and was named by Octavian *Colonia Victrix Philippensium.*
D. Octavian gave the town its notable title of *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensius,* which appeared on coins.
E. Philippi became a Roman colony primarily composed therefore of the victorious veterans of the Civil War for many who fought in the battles of Philippi received as rewards after retirement the land around Philippi.
F. Philippi became a thriving city and many veterans after 20 years of service with a pension moved to Philippi.
G. Philippi became sort of a colony for retired Roman soldiers of Marc Antony and Augustus.
H. A Roman colony had to be made up of Roman citizens.
I. Octavian planted in Philippi a colony of Roman veterans with farms attached, a military outpost and miniature of Rome itself and the language of Philippi was Latin.
J. As a Roman colony, Philippi received many privileges that other cities in the empire did not have.
K. There was the freedom from taxation, scourging, freedom from arrest save in extreme cases, and the right of appeal to the Emperor.
L. Of all the privileges, which this title conferred, the possession of the “Italic right” (*ius Italicum*) was the most valuable.
M. It meant that the colonists enjoyed the same rights and privileges as if their land was on Italian soil.
N. Philippi became so great that every time that there was privilege to be granted to that part of the country, the Philippians were always involved.
O. If you lived in Philippi as a Roman citizen you had no taxes for the rest of your life!
P. Philippi was a Roman colony in a foreign country.
Q. They could vote and were governed by their own senate and legislature.
R. Philippi was in effect a “little Rome” in itself.
S. It truly was the “leading city of the district of Macedonia” (Acts. 16:12).
T. It was the principle town of its district by virtue of its privileges as a Roman colony.
U. The citizens of Philippi had good reason to claim that their large “colonial” city was the leading city of the district of Macedonia for it was made so by the Emperor Octavian himself.
W. It was the 1st city in the district of Macedonia by virtue of the Imperial edict, which proclaimed it a Roman colony.
X. Philippi’s intimate relationship with Rome made it the leading city of Macedonia.
Y. The inhabitants of nearby cities such as Thessalonica, Amphipolis and Neapolis did not have privileges that the Philippians enjoyed for they were not Roman colonies.
Z. Only Philippi could make the claim of being a Roman colony!

IV. Courier

A. The Philippian states that Epaphroditus was a courier for Paul and as a courier he more than likely followed the course taken by imperial couriers carrying dispatches from Rome to the Roman colony of Philippi.
B. The regular course for the couriers carrying dispatches from Rome was along the Apian Way to Brundisium.
C. Trip to Philippi
1. Then they crossed over the Adriatic Sea to Dyrrachium, which was along the eastern coast of the province of Macedonia, or they went to Aulona, and then they went by the Via Egnatia to Thessalonica and Philippi and its harbor Neapolis.

2. The direct and apparently easy route along the coast to Neapolis was avoided by the Roman road (as the iternaries agreed): the road turned away from the crossing of the Hebrus at Amphipolis (Act 16) inland to Philippi, the great Roman colonia, before seeking the harbor; but there was, doubtless, always a path in local use from Amphipolis direct to Neapolis.

3. Rome to Brundisium along the Apian Way was approximately 360 miles.

4. Brundisium to Dyrrachium or Aulona took 2 days.

5. Dyrrachium or Aulona to Neapolis was approximately 380 miles.

6. Travelers on foot seem to have accomplished about 16 or 20 Roman miles per day.

7. This estimate of 20 was according to the experiences and observations of William Ramsay (*Church in the Roman Empire*, page 65).

8. It is confirmed by fragmentary itinerary of a journey through the Cilician Gates, dating from the 1st century in which the daily stages vary from 18 to 22 Roman miles and by the principle of Roman law that the number of days' grace allowed by the praetor to parties at a distance was reckoned at the rate of one day for each 20 miles.

9. The estimate may seem short, but a consideration of the distances, mutationes and mansiones, on the Bordeaux Pilgrim’s Itinerary would suggest that the average daily stage was even shorter, 16 to 18 Roman miles and this shorter estimate is in accordance with the following unbiased testimony of Sir H. Johnston, in the *Nineteenth Century*, 1902, pages 728-729) speaking of the rate of travel on foot, suited for the presumably hardy and strong African workmen going to the Transvaal mines, says, ‘It should be laid down as an absolute rule that not more than 15 miles (16 or 17 Roman miles) are to be accomplished in 1 day.’

10. It may therefore by confidently assumed that the ordinary rate for a long journey on foot was about 17 Roman miles per day.

D. Rate of Travel

1. A long journey at such a rate of traveling was sufficiently fatiguing.

2. The couriers, undoubtedly, were soldiers; only to them could such an important service be entrusted; and doubtless picked men alone were employed.

3. The service must have been planned with a view to be consistent with what can judiciously be expected from good soldiers as a permanent duty.

4. It would appear that a courier carried through to its destination the dispatches with which he was entrusted and that these were not passed from hand to hand!

5. Imperial couriers carried their dispatches as a rule from Rome to their destination, waiting for nothing by the way.

6. Couriers and rapid travelers did one stage of the journey before noon, and a 2nd in the evening, each of 5 hours, 25 miles.

7. Practical experience will show that walking 16 miles or driving 25 miles day after day without intermission in the hot season, is quite sufficient for the strength of the ordinary man, and that only men of more than average strength and endurance can stand a long course of riding 50 miles per day.

8. The question might be raised whether during the most temperate months of the year a quicker rate of traveling was required of the post couriers.

9. The evidence at our disposal does not permit a certain reply; but it is most probable that the rate was uniform for the whole year.

10. Every season offers, or may offer, its own special hindrances to rapid travel; and it would be necessary either to have 1 uniform rate, or to estimate the proper rate for each journey separately according to the weather and circumstances which would be absurd.

E. Safety

1. Although the Roman military was able to greatly improve the security of the traveler, as never before in the ancient world there was still a considerable amount of insecurity.
2. The inscriptions often mention guards or travelers slain by robbers.
3. Juvenal speaks of the criminals of the Campanian roads, who when actively pursued in their usual haunts find it the safest course to take refuge in Rome itself (Sat. 3.305f.).
4. The case described in Luke 10:30 was no uncommon one.
5. Paul’s account of the dangers he faced while traveling throughout the Empire are documented in 2 Cor. 11:26.
6. It was especially dangerous in journeys through mountainous districts, where roads were not carefully guarded, that Paul experienced these dangers (cf. Acts 13:14, 51; 14:24; 16:8).
7. But there was sometimes danger on the most frequently traveled roads.
8. Poorer travelers were those who suffered most, as was natural whereas the rich had large trains: important persons were granted an escort in some cases such as Lucian was escorted by 2 soldiers through Cappadocia (Alex. 55).
9. The Roman roads were probably at their best during the 1st century after Augustus had put an end to war and disorder.
10. In turbulent period at the close of Nero’s reign, disorder crept in again and it is doubtful if the Flavian rule ever succeeded in repressing it so completely as Augustus had done.
11. Thus Paul, Epaphroditus, Titus and Timothy traveled in the best and safest period, and yet the roads even there were in some place far from safe (though probably this was only in exceptional parts).

F. Correspondence and Travel
1. Communication by letter had been common from remote antiquity and with the great development of travel and communication in the Roman Imperial period, it might have been expected that communication by letter should have been greatly developed and increased but this was not the case until advent of Christianity.
2. The 1st century Christians developed the letter into new forms, applied it to new uses, and placed it on a much higher plane than it had ever before stood upon.
3. In their hands communication by letter became one of the most important, if not the most important, of all agencies for consolidating and maintaining the sense of unity among the scattered members of one universal church!
4. The unity of the scattered churches throughout the Roman Empire was kept alive by travel and by correspondence.
5. Since Paul communicated doctrine through his epistles there was thus a great responsibility attached to the messenger delivering the epistle to be read to the different local assemblies throughout the Roman Empire.

V. Character

A. Paul uses very complimentary titles for this man, which we will note in detail.
1. Accusative masculine singular noun adelphon (ajdelfon), "brother."
2. Accusative masculine singular adjective sunergon (sunergon), "fellow-worker."
3. Accusative masculine singular noun sustratioten (sustratiwthn), "fellow-soldier."

B. The first title reveals that he was a fellow-believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and thus a member of the royal family of God and a son of God.
C. The 2nd title reveals that was a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and the royal family of God.
D. The 3rd title also reveals that he was involved in spiritual combat with the kingdom of darkness.
E. In these titles for Epaphroditus Paul expresses his great appreciation of his coming to Rome and of his service to him and also commends him to the Philippians on his return.
F. Epaphroditus has been the bearer of gifts sent by the Philippian churches to Paul, and in particular the large, properly motivated, grace-gift which he received that has prompted the writing of this epistle (Phlp. 4:18).
G. He is the one who gave the report to Paul regarding the spiritual status of the Philippian church revealing to Paul the dispute between the 2 women, Euodia and Syntyche.
H. His service to Paul and the Philippian church almost cost him his life on this particular trip to Rome (Phlp. 2:27).

I. This man was evidently very much loved and appreciated by the Philippian church since Philippians 2:26 implies that the Philippians were greatly distressed over illness in Rome.

J. Before the epistle to the Philippians was sent, there had evidently been an extensive period of travel and correspondence between Paul and the church at Philippi.

K. They had been informed of Paul’s arrest and imprisonment.

L. A collection for him had been undertaken and the money had been sent with Epaphroditus who became ill while he was with Paul.

M. The Philippians learned of this serious illness (which could have been due to the Roman fever or simply exhaustion from the extensive traveling between Philippi and Rome), and their anxiety concerning Epaphroditus had been conveyed to the apostle.

N. Paul decided to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi so that the church could see he was fully recovered (2:25-28).

O. Thus it must be supposed that word was sent between Philippi and Rome 4 times before the Philippian epistle was sent.

P. The extensive traveling activity on the part of Epaphroditus must have therefore taken place within a 10 month time period and thus more than likely was the reason for Epaphroditus’ illness.

Q. The original language of Philippians 2:30 is very revealing since Paul employs the verb \( \text{parabouleuomai} \) (parabouleuvomai) to describe his service.

R. The verb means to expose oneself to life threatening situation and danger.

S. It indicates that he gambled with his life, exposed himself to danger, exposing oneself to life threatening situations, risking one’s own life on these frequent trips from Philippi to Rome during the previous 10 months.

T. So it is implied that the constant strain and pressure of bearing a large monetary gift, which would make him a target of criminals during his travels, exhausted him physically and mentally leaving him susceptible and vulnerable to illness.

U. Thus, we can assume that physical and mental exhaustion during the past 10 months left him susceptible and vulnerable to the illness he contracted or he simply did suffer greatly from physical exhaustion.

V. His sickness more than likely was from constant exposure to the elements because of the extensive traveling over the past 10 months and overexertion in fulfilling his tasks for the Philippians and Paul!

W. Paul’s description of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25-30 reveals the nobility of character which he possessed and his integrity.

X. This passage reveals that he was unselfish possessing a servant’s mentality because he had the mind of Christ.

VI. Leader

A. Although Paul founded the church at Philippi, Epaphroditus was their pastor-teacher.

B. Paul uses him here, as another example for the Philippian believes to follow.

C. Epaphroditus led by example and specifically by his self-sacrificial actions on behalf of others.

D. Epaphroditus possessed humility and was not occupied with self, thus he was unselfish (cf. Phlp. 2:2-4).

E. He possessed the same servant’s mentality as the humanity of Christ in hypostatic did during our Lord’s 1st Advent.

F. Epaphroditus had the same attitude that our Lord possessed (cf. Phlp. 2:5-8).

G. He was employing the 2 power options, 3 spiritual skills, 10 problems solving devices and executing the 3 stages of the adult spiritual life, which compose the 4 spiritual mechanics of the operational type spiritual life (cf. Phlp. 2:12-23).

H. He performed all of his activities without murmuring and complaining nor did he doubt the faithfulness of God to him, which is the expression of the integrity of God (cf. Phlp. 2:14).
I. He demonstrated himself to be a faithful student of his Mentor, God the Holy Spirit (cf. Phlp. 2:15).
J. He also appeared as a luminary in the cosmic system of Satan by exhibiting the Word of life (cf. Phlp. 2:16).
K. He was self-sacrificial in his service to the Lord, Paul and the Philippians (cf. Phlp. 2:17).
L. Paul commends him in Philippians 2:25-30 because he wants the Philippians to follow his example as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who is executing his own spiritual life which is designed to manifest or glorify both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ during the rebuttal phase of Satan’s appeal trial.
M. Philippians 2:25 describes one of the greatest Church Age believers to have ever lived, Epaphroditus.
N. Epaphroditus was an invisible hero with an invisible impact on history under 5 categories:
   1. Personal
   2. National
   3. International
   4. Angelic
   5. Heritage
O. Epaphroditus was a man of action like the apostle Paul.
P. He was a grace man.
Q. Epaphroditus like Paul imitated the humanity of Christ in hypostatic union when He operated under a self-imposed kenosis during His 1st Advent.
R. He imitated the Lord under the 3 categories:
   1. Thought
   2. Word
   3. Action
S. He possessed true humility and expressed it through his self-sacrificial actions thus imitating the Lord Jesus.
T. Paul’s description of Epaphroditus is a listing of the characteristics of a great leader in the army of Christ.
   1. “Brother”: He must be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.
   2. “Co-worker”: He must serves alongside other believers.
   3. “Fellow-soldier”: He must serve alongside other believers enduring the hardships of spiritual combat.
   4. “Commander”: He must be expressing his authority through word and conduct.
   5. “Servant”: He must be the servant of other believers.
U. He serves as the model for every pastor-teacher living in the church age to aspire to.
V. He operated under the principles of leadership as taught by our Lord in His Upper Room Discourse.
   1. John 13:13-17, “You call Me Teacher and Lord (kurios); and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”
   2. John 13:34, “A new commandment I give to you, that you virtuously love one another, even as I have virtuously loved you, that you also virtuously love one another. By this all men will know that you are My students, if you possess virtue-love for one another.”
W. Great leaders are authority oriented and lead by example.
X. Great leaders are servants to those that they have authority over.
Y. They exercise their authority to benefit others rather than themselves.
Z. All leaders whether angelic or human are subject to the Lord Jesus Christ Who controls history as sovereign ruler over the entire cosmos.
AA. Epaphroditus manifested the Lord Jesus Christ in the devil’s world through his self-sacrificial actions.
BB. The pastor-teacher is a spiritual commander who not only is to feed his troops by communicating doctrine but also he is to lead by example.
The pastor-teacher is to serve his troops by faithfully communicating the Word of God on a daily basis.

Epaphroditus was the pastor-teacher of one of the greatest spiritual combat units ever in the church age, the Philippian church, thus he is one of the churches greatest leaders.

1. Although Paul founded the church at Philippi, Epaphroditus was now their spiritual commander pastor-teacher.
2. Epaphroditus led by example and specifically by his self-sacrificial actions on behalf of others.
3. He possessed humility and was not occupied with self, thus he was unselfish (cf. Phlp. 2:2-4).
4. He possessed the same servant’s mentality as the humanity of Christ in hypostatic did during our Lord’s 1st Advent.
5. Epaphroditus had the same attitude that our Lord possessed (cf. Phlp. 2:5-8).
6. He was employing the 2 power options, 3 spiritual skills, 10 problems solving devices and executing the 3 stages of the adult spiritual life, which compose the 4 spiritual mechanics of the operational type spiritual life (cf. Phlp. 2:12-23).
7. He performed all of his activities without murmuring and complaining nor did he doubt the faithfulness of God to him, which is the expression of the integrity of God (cf. Phlp. 2:14).
8. He demonstrated himself to be a faithful student of his Mentor, God the Holy Spirit (cf. Phlp. 2:15).
9. He also appeared as a luminary in the cosmic system of Satan by exhibiting the Word of life (cf. Phlp. 2:16).
10. He was self-sacrificial in his service to the Lord, Paul and the Philippians (cf. Phlp. 2:17).

VII. True Friend

A. Epaphroditus was also a true friend of the apostle Paul and to the Philippians.
B. A friend loves to the forgetfulness of himself.
C. Paul and Epaphroditus were true friends.
D. They were forever seeking the interests of each other.
E. Epaphroditus was also a true friend of the Lord Jesus Christ because he was always seeking the interests or objectives of our Lord (Jn. 15:15-16).
F. A friend loves at all times whether in adversity or prosperity (Prv. 17:17; 2 Tm. 1:16).
G. Epaphroditus loved Paul while he was imprisoned and when he was at liberty.
H. He was willing to give his life up for his friends such as Paul and the Philippians as our Lord did in His humanity during His 1st Advent (Jn. 15:13-14).