

Fellow Soldiers in Christ

Text: Philippians 2:25-30

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

In the NT, the apostle Paul often uses the imagery from the military to describe the spiritual battles that we all face throughout our lives. He calls us to put on the armor of God. He reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the forces of darkness in the invisible realm. He calls us to fight the good fight of the faith. It makes sense that he would use this language, considering how much time he spent chained to a Roman soldier during his imprisonment. It would have been natural for him to strike a conversation with the men who stood guard in his residence, and he may have gotten to know them well. He would have noticed the armor they wore and the weapons they carried. Maybe he heard some of their stories from the battlefield, and listened to them talk about their buddies.

One of the reasons the Roman army was so effective is that the individual soldiers marched together into battle as one. When they lifted their shields they formed an impenetrable barrier that deflected the arrows launched by the enemy. They stood shoulder to shoulder and advanced as a unit. When one stumbled his fellow soldier was there to help lift him back up. When one was in trouble, the others rallied to his defense. No one went into battle alone. They fought together. It was impressive, and struck fear into every opposing army.

In the Christian life there are fellow soldiers who stand beside us, and we are much more effective when we rely on one another.

In Paul's ministry, he was blessed with a handful of close personal friends who stuck with him through thick and thin. They partnered together with him in the work of the ministry. They were eager to lend a hand. They encouraged him when he began to sink into despair. He was so grateful to have them in his life. These men had his back. He could count on them, no matter what hardships or trials he was going through.

He mentions one of them in Philippians 2:25–30 (NASB95). A man by the name of Epaphroditus had been a tremendous blessing to him. We don't know very much about him, other than he apparently was a member of the church in Philippi. The congregation had sent him to Rome, where Paul was in prison, to deliver a gift. Epaphroditus had encouraged Paul at a time when he may have felt isolated and alone. In verse 25 Paul says,

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Paul refers to Epaphroditus as his fellow soldier. That tells us something about the friendship they shared. This was someone who had been there for the apostle during the most difficult moments of his life. They had been in the trenches together, and fought the good fight of the faith side by side.

Maybe you can think of people in your life who have been there for you in the same way. When you're going through the battles of life, they are the ones you lean on for strength. When you are hurting and wounded, their encouragement ministers to your heart. When you stumble they reach out with grace to help you regain your footing. And this relationship is not one-sided, you are there for each other.

We see some of the qualities of what this relationship looks like in the example of Epaphroditus.

A fellow soldier is someone who loves us like a brother.

That's what Epaphroditus had become to Paul. In verse 25 the apostle says, "For he is my brother, coworker, and fellow soldier..."

He was more than an a mere acquaintance, more than someone he shook hands with after the worship service on Sunday morning. But they had gotten to know one another well. It wasn't superficial, it was real. Sometimes going through adversity with someone has the effect of drawing us closer together. When I think of some of my brothers in the Lord who have walked beside me through trials and tribulations, I think of people who have come to love me like a brother, that I can call on no matter the hour – day or night – and I know they will respond with a helping hand and a listening ear. They are people I can open up to about whatever is going on in my heart.

A fellow soldier is someone who is willing to give their lives for us.

In verse 29 Paul writes, "...He risked his life so that he could make up for your inability to serve me."

In the army, soldiers often put their lives on the line for each other and do so without hesitation. Epaphroditus had done that for Paul. In the process of delivering supplies the apostle, he became deathly ill. But he was willing to risk his life to serve his friend.

Think of how your brothers and sisters in the Lord have been willing to make personal sacrifices to minister to your needs. Maybe it was something as simple as giving up a Saturday afternoon to help you with a project around the house. Or maybe it was bringing over a bag of groceries when you were out of work. Or maybe it was something even bigger. They did so willingly, without hesitation, and you would do the same for them. This is true devotion, this is love, when we give of ourselves for the sake of others.

A fellow soldier serves beside us as we follow Christ.

In verse 29 the Philippians were encouraged to “Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him,³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ...”

Epaphroditus was not only devoted to Paul, but he was also devoted to Christ and was eager to do his part in advancing the work of the gospel. One of the reasons Paul was able to continue his work, from prison, is because of faithful people like Epaphroditus. Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, but it was Epaphroditus who delivered it to the congregation. They were a team, helping one another fulfill their role in the body of Christ.

That’s what our fellow soldiers do. We bring out the best in one another, and help each other live out our faith. All of us have a different role in the work of the Lord, but we are called to serve together side by side to accomplish a common purpose. Each of us have been given different gifts and abilities by the Spirit of God so that we can complement one another in the ministry.

We keep each other focused on the mission, and hold one another accountable in our Christian walk. We wouldn’t get very far without our fellow soldiers.

Who Walks Beside You Into Battle?

I was challenged this week listening to a message from the GGF leadership conference. Pastor John Spooner made the comment that we are either entering a battle, or we are in the midst of a battle, or we are exiting the battle. That’s the reality of our Christian life. There is an unseen enemy who is always looking for an opportunity to strike. So don’t be surprised when you find yourself going through some struggle or adversity. In those moments find strength in the Lord, and in your brothers and sisters in Christ.

I encourage you to think about the people who are fellow soldiers with you in the Lord. Who are those people you lean on through the battles of life? Who are the ones that rally to your side when the battle is tough? How can you encourage them like Epaphroditus encouraged Paul? The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone. We need others to walk beside us through the battle.