

Shayla: Who is Paul's true yokefellow in Philippians 4:3?

Meforshim:

In order to be able to answer this question, it is important first of all to get a little historical context. On his first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas visited the Galatian territories. On his second missionary journey, Paul apparently wanted to repeat the experience but argued with Barnabas over John Mark. Barnabas wanted to bring his nephew and Paul, due to a previous bad experience, thought John Mark was not ready. The dynamic duo thus split up and Paul presently found himself partnered with Silas.

They ended up in Philippi where they met a woman named Lydia.¹ Her hospitality made it possible for them to work in that area and soon a vibrant church took shape in this predominantly Gentile city. It was in Philippi that Paul cast out a demon from a young prophetess² and got thrown in jail for his troubles. It was in Philippi that Paul and Silas were miraculously freed from jail and their jailer threw himself to his knees and posed the famous (and all important question) "What must I do to be saved?"³

In due course, Paul left for other pastures and the Philippians avidly followed his adventures, helping whenever they could. However, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and they lost sight of him. When they next heard of him, he was in jail again but this time in Rome! They sent Epaphroditus (a Gentile whose name means "given to or belonging to Aphrodite") to him with some financial and emotional support. It was a long and perilous journey.

After a great length of time, Paul sent Epaphroditus back to the Philippians, carrying a letter that came later to be known as "Paul's epistle to the Philippians." In the middle of the letter, he says the following about Epaphroditus:

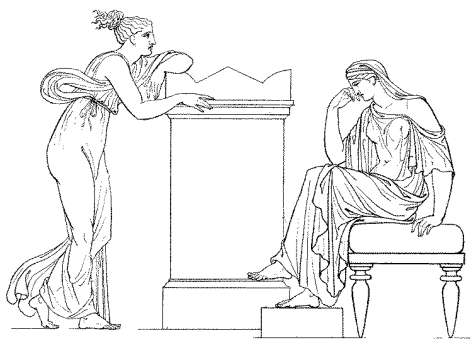
- Philippians 2:25-30 HCSB But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus--my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need - 26 since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. 27 Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another. 28 For this reason, I am very eager to send him so that you may rejoice when you see him again and I may be less anxious. 29 Therefore, welcome him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in honor, 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up what was lacking in your ministry to me.

Keep this in mind as you read the passage in question:

- Philippians 4:2-3 HCSB I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life.

Obviously, the "true partner" (as the HCSB puts it) can be neither Euodia nor Syntyche because the partner is supposed to help them. It cannot be Clement because the partner is addressed as a person other than Clement and the rest of Paul's

co-workers. The letter is not addressed to a single individual but rather "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons".⁴ So it is not a specific individual of the church at Philippi that Paul is addressing. My suggestion is that the "true partner" is the man who risked his life to bring Paul aid and who had just returned to Philippi with the letter in his hand and who was very likely reading it to the assembled congregation – Epaphroditus.



¹ Acts 16:13-15

² Acts 16:16-18

³ Acts 16:30-31

⁴ Philippians 1:1