

In the annals of early Christianity, certain figures stand out not for their prominent teaching roles but for their essential work as messengers and couriers. This chapter examines three such individuals—Epaphroditus, Tychicus, and Onesimus—who played crucial roles in supporting Paul's ministry through their faithful service as bearers of letters, representatives of churches, and carriers of material support.

Each of these servants faced significant risks and challenges. Epaphroditus nearly died in service to Paul, Tychicus traversed vast distances carrying important epistles, and Onesimus transformed from a fugitive servant into a trusted brother in Christ. Their stories interweave themes of faithfulness, transformation, and sacrificial service that were essential to the spread of the gospel in the first century. Through their examples, we see how the early church functioned not just through its prominent teachers, but through the dedicated work of those who served behind the scenes.

EPAPHRODITUS

WHAT WE KNOW FROM SCRIPTURE

- **Philippians 2:25–30**
 - Called Paul's brother, companion in labour, and fellowsoldier
 - Sent by the Philippians to minister to Paul's needs
 - Became gravely ill—nearly died in service
 - Paul attributes his recovery to God's mercy, not to miraculous healing
 - Reflects a dispensational shift from Kingdom-era miracles to providential care
 - Paul expresses emotional sorrow and concern for both Epaphroditus and the Philippians
 - Urges the church to honor such men who risk their lives in ministry
- **Philippians 4:18**
 - Delivered the Philippians' material gift to Paul
 - Paul calls their support a fragrant offering, acceptable and well-pleasing to God
 - Epaphroditus acted as a priestly representative of the church's generosity
 - His trustworthiness and integrity are assumed in the handling of this task

CHURCH TRADITIONS

- Listed among the Seventy Disciples in later ecclesiastical tradition
- Venerated in both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches
- Said to have served as bishop of Philippi, Andriaca, or Terracina
- Feast celebrated on January 4 (or January 17 Julian) during the Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles

TYCHICUS

SCRIPTURAL RECORD

- **Acts 20:4**
 - Part of the delegation carrying Gentile relief to Jerusalem
 - Identified as being from Asia, likely Ephesus
 - Accompanied Paul through Macedonia and Asia
- **Ephesians 6:21–22; Colossians 4:7–8**
 - Described as a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellowservant
 - Delivered epistles to Ephesus and Colossae
 - Entrusted with reporting Paul's condition and encouraging the churches
- **Titus 3:12**
 - Considered for temporary replacement of Titus in Crete
- **2 Timothy 4:12**
 - Sent to Ephesus, likely to support or replace Timothy

CHURCH TRADITIONS

- Included among the Seventy Apostles in Eastern tradition
- Feast celebrated January 4 as part of the Synaxis of the Seventy
- Said to have been bishop of Colophon, Chalcedon, or Caesarea
- Traditions are inconsistent and based more on veneration than historical certainty

ONESIMUS

SCRIPTURAL RECORD

- **Philemon 10–14**
 - Converted under Paul’s imprisonment
 - Once “unprofitable,” now “profitable” (a play on his name)
 - Paul sends him back to Philemon with deep affection
 - Desired to keep Onesimus, but refrains to honor Philemon’s authority
- **Philemon 15–18**
 - Paul suggests Onesimus’s departure was providential
 - Now to be received not as a servant, but a beloved brother
 - Possibly raises questions of physical kinship (“in the flesh”)
 - Paul offers to pay any debt Onesimus owes
- **Philemon 19–25**
 - Paul reaffirms his offer in his own handwriting
 - Trusts Philemon will do more than requested
 - Requests lodging for a possible visit
 - Sends final greetings from ministry team
- **Colossians 4:9**
 - Travels with Tychicus
 - Called “one of you,” confirming his Colossian origin
 - Commended as a “faithful and beloved brother”

CHURCH TRADITIONS

- Included among the Seventy Apostles in church tradition
- Said to have served as bishop of Byzantium and later Ephesus
- Martyred under Roman persecution
- Feast celebrated on February 15/16 in Eastern and Western churches
- Honored as Saint Onesimus in Roman Catholic tradition