



THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Lesson Number 21



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Standard Version (2001), KJV=King James Version (1611), NKJV=New King James Version (1982), NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

FINAL LESSON IN COLOSSIANS

SUNDRY SAINTS

^{4:7} All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: ⁸ Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; ⁹ With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) ¹¹ And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. ¹⁵ Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. ¹⁶ And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it. ¹⁸ The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen. ^{KJV} (Col 4:7-18)

INTRODUCTION

The closing section of this Epistle provides numerous references to other brethren – brethren who were involved in the good work of the Lord. There is more in this section than the mere mentioning of a few names. A certain spirit exudes from this text that must be maintained among the people of God. It reflects a sense of spiritual values, and the manner

in which the saints are regarded. You will behold an evident closeness of spirit among these brethren, and the way in which they profited one another.

A very real concern for one another is also made known. These were not mere professional acquaintances, or people who, so to speak, just belonged to

the same group.

It will also become evident that what is delivered to one group of believers can also be of profit to another group. There is a commonality among those who are in Christ Jesus that produces this kind of circumstance. Churches were not islands unto themselves. Nor, indeed,

OUTLINE

- ▶ TYCHICUS (4:7-8)
- ▶ ONESIMUS (4:9)
- ▶ ARISTARCHUS AND MARCUS (4:10)
- ▶ JESUS CALLED JUSTUS (4:11)
- ▶ EPAPHRAS (4:12-13)
- ▶ LUKE AND DEMAS (4:14)
- ▶ LAODICEAN BRETHREN AND NYMPHAS (4:15)
- ▶ WHEN THIS EPISTLE IS READ (4:16)
- ▶ ARCHIPPUS (4:17)
- ▶ THE FINAL SALUTATION (4:18)

were they united by denominational affiliation or an institutional agenda.

There are people whose names are so undeniably associated with the work of the kingdom, that the mere mentioning of their name ministers edification to the faithful, exhortation to the lagging, and conviction to the lethargic.

This is a depiction of “*the whole family in heaven and earth*” that is named after “*our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Eph 3:15). It reflects how we see one another, and how we speak of one another. The saints are more than a confraternity of people with similar fleshly interests. They are not a cluster of people from the same age group or domestic circumstance. The thing that binds them together is not their marital state, their positions in society, or their similar backgrounds in the world. They are not bound together by a religious creed, a church name, or educational attainments.

Having said all of that, I must acknowledge that I have had precious few experiences of being associated with such a group of people. For some, the size of their assembly is their distinction. On an even lower level, some are noted solely for the facilities in which they meet. For still others, the only thing for which they are noted is their minister, or their church staff, or a particular service they may render to the general community. **You will find no such associations in the text before us.**

The fact that professing *Christians* rarely refer to each in the manner

reflected in this text, indicates that a certain spiritual deterioration has taken place in the church. This is evidence that the departure of which the Apostles warned has, indeed, taken place (1 Tim 4:1). Therefore, for the most part, people are not viewed as laborers together in Christ. Religious organizations have managed to upstage the glorious distinctions that result from tasting of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:5).

As we willingly expose our hearts and minds to this text, it is my prayer that you will be challenged to pursue this perspective of the people of God – whether on a congregational or personal level.

THE DIVINE MANNER

There are different ways in which the Spirit creates a framework for remembering people. Everyone is not remembered the same way. In these various remembrances, there is a certain spiritual knowledge that is being cultured. That is, the people themselves are not the point. Rather, they provide a sort of index to the way the Lord views men. A few examples will suffice.

Those Who Were First

There are individuals who began a new kind of era. The ultimate “*first*” people were Adam and Eve. Adam is referred to as “*the first man*” (1 Cor 15:45,47). Enos, son of Seth marked the time when men began to call on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26). Enoch is the first man said to have “*walked with God*” (Gen 5:22), and the first person said to have prophesied (Jude 1:14). Abraham is the first man said to have “*believed God*” (Gen 15:6), and is thus referred to as the “*father of all them that believe*” (Rom 4:11). Later, Epaphroditus is said to have been “*the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ*” (Rom 16:5).

Those Who Were Wicked

Some people are remembered for

their wickedness. Cain was a murderer (Gen 4:8), and was “*of the wicked one*” (1 John 3:12). Some were noted for being “*sons*” or “*children*” of Belial (1 Sam 2:12; Judges 10:22; 1 Kgs 21:10). Other wicked people include Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:33), Ahab (1 Kgs 16:30), Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4), Judas (John 6:70-71), and Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim 4:14).

Known Only for Righteousness

There are some who are known only for their righteousness, and against whom no sin is recorded. This does not mean they were morally perfect, or did not require a Savior. It is, however, how God has chosen for us to remember them. Included among this number are Abel (Heb 11:4), Enoch (Gen 5:22-24), Noah (Gen 6:9), Joseph (Psa 105:17-22), Job (Job 1:1), Daniel (Dan 10:11), and John the Baptist (Matt 11:11).

Noted for Their Conversion

Some individuals are only noted for their conversion. We know little or nothing of them prior to their conversion and after their conversion. Included in this number are the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-34), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7-12), honorable Grecian women (Acts 17:12), Dionysius the Aeropagite and Damaris (Acts 17:34), and Cripus, ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8).

Noted for Their Good Works

There are people in Scripture who are especially noted for their good works. They include “*a certain centurion*” (Luke 7:2-5), Dorcas (Acts 9:36), Timothy (Acts 16:1-2), Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), and Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3-4).

Noted for being Precious to God

There are also people who are especially noted for being close to the Lord. Abraham was “*the friend of God*” (James 2:23). God said David was a “*man after Mine own heart*” (Acts 13:22). Jesus referred to Antipas as “*My faithful*”

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martyr” (Rev 2:13). Daniel was referred to as “greatly beloved” in heaven (Dan 9:23; 10:11,19).

Summation

While only introductory to the matters I will now discuss, the above

references confirm the **personal** nature of our dealing with the Lord. **There are things for which we can be particular known.**

There is provision in Christ Jesus for this to be a great spiritual asset – both

to you individually, those who know you, and those who hear of you. In a way, our reputation, or that for which we are known, is a stewardship vouchsafed to us. By the grace of God, we can make that stewardship a blessing, and a source of great kingdom benefits.

TYCHICUS

“^{4:7} All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: ⁸ Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts.”

Tychicus is mentioned five times in Scripture. All of them are favorable, giving some indication of the good spirit of this brother.

✚ **ACCOMPANIED PAUL INTO ASIA.** *“And there accompanied him [Paul] into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4.*

✚ **FAITHFUL.** *“But that ye also may*

who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts” (Col 4:7-8).

✚ **A GOOD STEWARD.** *“And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus” (2 Tim 4:12).*

✚ **AVAILABLE.** *“When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter” (Titus 3:12).*

Here is a man of which we know nothing but good. We know nothing of his life prior to coming to Christ. The only thing we do know about him pertains to laboring in the vineyard

ALL MY STATE
“All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you . . . ” Other versions read, *“all the news about me,”* ^{NKJV} *“all my affairs,”* ^{NASB} *“all that concerns me,”* ^{DARBY} *“all about my activities,”* ^{ESV} *“my whole state,”* ^{GENEVA} and *“how I am getting along.”* ^{NLT}

Ponder someone making known all of your affairs to a congregation of believers. Consider who it is that you would trust to faithfully do this. That will give you some idea of the character and perception of Tychicus.

However, even then, we are speaking of conveying the affairs of Paul the Apostle, who *“labored more abundantly than they all”* (1 Cor 15:10). This is a man who received an *“abundance of revelations”* (1 Cor 12:7), and was appointed to go to the Gentiles and *“open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in”* Christ (Acts 26:18).

Elsewhere Paul sent laborers to inform the churches of both his manners and his labors. To the Corinthians he wrote, *“For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church”* (1 Cor 4:17). He also sent Tychicus to Ephesus to make known his *“affairs”* (Eph 6:21-22).

Making known the affairs of this man involves correlating his labors with his commission, and confirming his

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know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. (Eph 6:21-22).

✚ **TRUSTWORTHY.** *“All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you,*

of the Lord. There is no sin recorded against him, and no reference to his marital state. We only know he was *“of Asia.”* We do not where or how he was converted. That certainly would not look good on a resume.

Yet, from what is said of him, I feel that I know him, and he has proved to be a great comfort to my soul and challenge to my spirit.

faithfulness. We are not speaking of a mere biography, or relating Paul's daily routines. This report had to do with kingdom matters and things that would edify.

BELOVED BROTHER

"... who is a beloved brother. . ." Other versions read, *"the beloved brother,"*^{ASV} *"our dearest brother,"*^{DOUAY} *"my beloved brother,"*^{NAB} and *"a very dear brother."*^{NJB}

Tychicus is one of three brethren who are referred to in this way. The other two are Onesimus (Col 4:9) and Peter's reference to Paul (2 Pet 3:15). Paul referred to Timothy as *"my beloved son"* (2 Tim 1:2), Philemon as *"our dearly beloved"* (Phile 1:1), and Amplias as *"my beloved in the Lord"* (Rom 16:9). He also referred to Stachys as *"my beloved"* (Rom 16:9), Persis as *"beloved"* (Rom 16:12) and Apphia as *"our beloved"* (Phil 2:1:2). Some churches were addressed as *"dearly beloved."* They include Rome (Rom 12:9), Corinth (1 Cor 10:4), and Philippi (Phil 4:1).

The point is that not all believers are referred to in this manner. Further, this kind of reference did not reflect a fleshly preference. **Rather, it distinguished those so referenced as excelling in spiritual virtues and kingdom labors.** Tychicus ranked high in the kingdom of God. Jesus had more of him, and he responded with a diligence that excelled that of many others.

In my judgment, it is good to seek to be of note among key spiritual men and women – like Andronicus and Junia, who were *"of note among the Apostles"* (Rom 16:7). God's people must crucify the tendency to please their peers, and be well liked by those who dwell far off from God.

It is important to not only consider what is said about us, but who is doing the saying. May God give you grace to live a life that can be reported with joy.

FAITHFUL MINISTER

"... and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. . ." Other versions read, *"faithful servant and fellow bond-servant,"*^{NASB} *"true servant and helper in the word,"*^{BBE}

A *"minister"* is one who *"executes the commands of another . . . a servant."*^{THAYER} It also means, *"one who renders helpful service, a servant, helper."*^{FRIBERG}

A *"faithful minister"* is one who constantly and reliably carries out the will of another – in this case, the will of the Lord. This is someone who can be counted on to do the will of the Lord, thinking and acting in harmony with His will, and doing what he has been given to do.

Several people are noted in Scripture for being *"faithful."* They include Moses (Num 12:7), Hananiah, Nehemiah's brother (Neh 7:2), Abraham (Neh 9:8), Daniel (Dan 6:4), Timothy (1 Cor 4:17), Epaphras (Col 1:7), Onesimus (Col 4:9), and Silvanus (1 Pet 5:12).

Tychicus was a *"minister"* who was steadfast, and did not shrink back from his calling. If left to himself, he defaulted to the will of the Lord, and was always profitable to the people of God.

the Epistle to the Colossians, faithfully delivering what Paul had written in prison.

Know Your Estate

"... that he might know your estate. . ." Other versions read, *"that he may know your circumstances,"*^{NKJV} and *"that you may know our circumstances."*^{NASB} Versions favoring Tychicus knowing

the circumstances of the Colossians include the following: KJV, NKJV, DARBY, DOUAY, GENEVA, RWB, WEB, and YLT. Versions favoring the Colossians being **informed about Paul's circumstances** include the following: NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, BBE, ESV, NAB, NAU, NJB, and NLT.

First, in my judgment, the nature of the Epistle requires that we see Paul sending Tychicus to learn more fully of the condition of the Colossians. They had been subjected to false teachers, as had been reported to Paul (2:18-23). Second, the mission of

A "faithful minister" is one who constantly and reliably carries out the will of another – in this case, the will of the Lord. This is someone who can be counted on to do the will of the Lord, thinking and acting in harmony with His will, and doing what he has been given to do.

May you be known as a *"faithful minister"* – one who can be counted on to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord!

WHY HE WAS SENT

"⁸ Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose. . ." From the standpoint of him going out from Paul, other versions read, *"I am sending him to you for this very purpose."*^{NKJV} From the standpoint of the Colossians receiving him, some versions read, *"I have sent him to you for this very purpose."*^{NASB} Whatever this purpose is, Tychicus will carry it out to the glory of God.

It is obvious from this reference that Tychicus was actually the bearer of

ministering comfort would be best accomplished when the condition of the Colossians was more fully known. Third, Paul has already affirmed that Tychicus would fully declare Paul's condition, and that he had sent him to do that (4:7). It does not seem probable that Paul would reiterate this again, in the very same sentence. I therefore conclude that Tychicus has also been sent to more fully know the present condition of the Colossians. **How had they weathered the doctrinal storms that had come against them?**

This purpose was similar to that involving Timothy's trip to Thessalonica. Of that trip Paul said, *"For this cause,*

Those who are given to speaking much about “restoring” things, would do well to bring back the practice of strengthening, encouraging, and comforting those who are fighting the good fight of faith.

when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain” (1 Thess 3:5). This manner was also declared in the book of Acts. “And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36).

In the institutionalized church of our day, there is much talk about starting churches, church planting, etc. Although such efforts are not without merit, it is passingly strange that we rarely hear of any effort to see how the churches are actually doing. Perhaps men have taken too much for granted in assuming this does not need to be done.

Comfort Your Hearts

“ . . . and comfort your hearts.”

Other versions read, “encourage your hearts,”^{NASB} “give your hearts comfort,”^{BBE} and “encourage you thoroughly.”^{NJB}

To “comfort” means “to call to one’s side - to console, encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort.”^{THAYER} “To relieve sorrow or distress, comfort, cheer up, encourage.”^{FRIBERG}

Here is an aspect of spiritual life that is essential. It is necessitated by the very nature of living by faith. We are in a hostile world that can contribute nothing to our faith (1 John 2:16). We are daily faced with an adversary who walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). Many false prophets have gone out into the world,

presenting a condition that makes for jeopardy (1 John 4:1). We have within us a competitive law that wars against the law of our mind (Rom 7:23). **Those circumstances require encouragement, consolation, and comfort.**

The history of the early church records seasons when comfort was ministered to the brethren (Acts 9:31). Barnabas “encouraged” the churches^{NKJV} (Acts 11:23). Paul went over the whole region of Macedonia, encouraging the brethren^{NKJV} (Acts 20:2). That was the manner of godly men.

Thus Paul sent Tychicus to Colossae to encourage them, insightfully cheering their hearts when he had learned of their state.

Those who are given to speaking much about “restoring” things, would do well to bring back the practice of strengthening, encouraging, and comforting those who are fighting the good fight of faith. **Too often, the saints who are the front lines of battle are only being discouraged by the church.**

ONESIMUS

“ 9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.”

Just as Jesus sent out His disciples “two and two” (Mk 6:7; Lk 10:L1), so the early church, and Paul personally, often followed this practice. We read of “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43), “Paul and Silas” (Acts 16:19), and “Paul and Timotheus” (Phil 1:1). There was also “Judas and Silas” (Acts 15:32), “Timotheus and Erastus” (Acts 19:22), Titus and “a brother” (2 Cor 12:18), and “Silvanus and Timotheus” (1 Thess 1:1).

The nature of kingdom labors often requires congenial spirits working together. That is involved in being “the body of Christ” – a fellowship in the truth.

HE WAS WITH TYCHICUS

“With Onesimus . . . ” Other versions read, “and with him Onesimus,”^{NASB} “HE is coming with Onesimus,”^{NIV} “together with Onesimus,”^{ASV} “with him I am sending Onesimus,”^{NJB} and “I am also sending Onesimus.”^{NLT}

There are only two direct references to Onesimus in Scripture, yet we know considerable about him.

- ✚ He was the run away slave of Philemon, whom Paul was now returning to him (Phile 1:10-12).
- ✚ Paul converted him while in prison (Phile 1:9).
- ✚ Because of begetting Onesimus in Christ, Paul considered him his son (Phile 1:9).

- ✚ Paul would have preferred to keep Onesimus with him, to minister to him while he was in bonds (Phile 1:13).
- ✚ He was a “brother beloved,” especially to Paul (Phile 1:16).
- ✚ Any indebtedness that Onesimus owed to Philemon, Paul said he would personally pay (Phile 1:18).

Here is a man who confirms that in Christ there is “neither bond nor free” (Gal 3:28). His affiliation with Christ raised him to a higher domain where earthly distinctions are not valid.

A FAITHFUL AND BELOVED BROTHER

“ . . . a faithful and beloved brother . . . ” Other versions read, “faithful and dear brother,”^{NIV} “true and

well beloved brother,^{BBE} “a most beloved and faithful brother,”^{DOUAY} and “a trustworthy and beloved brother.”^{NAB}

This is not a mere formal description of Onesimus – something that Christians simply say about one another. **Rather, this is an insightful remark that distinguishes Onesimus from the spiritually sluggish and unfaithful.**

Although Onesimus was a slave, and a runaway slave at that, he had responded to the Gospel in the submission that is begotten by faith. His life was a thank offering to God, and a source of much joy and encouragement to Paul. The word “faithful” contrasts sharply with the idea of a runaway slave who was “unprofitable” to his master (Phile 1:11). He had received a new heart and a new spirit, and was now noted for the changes wrought by his transformation.

ONE OF YOU

“... who is one of you . . .” These words suggest that Onesimus was from Colossae, and thus was now considered to be part of the brethren there. All of this suggests that Philemon was also from Colossae, and that the church there may even be the one meeting in his house (Phile 1:2). Archippus is said to be in the church meeting in Philemon’s house (Phile 1:2). He is also addressed in this Epistle to the Colossians (Col 4:17).

Now, Onesimus is declared to be “one” of the brethren in Colossae. Since he was converted **after** leaving Philemon, we assume he was not a member of that

fellowship prior to his conversion.

THEY SHALL MAKE KNOWN

“... They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.” Other versions read, “all things which are happening here,”^{NKJV} and “the whole situation here.”^{NASB}

Tychicus and Onesimus would faithfully report everything that had been taking place in Rome, where Paul was finally imprisoned, after being taken captive at Caesarea (approximately A.D 58-62). A lot had happened during that

came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31).

Now Paul depends upon Tychicus and Onesimus giving a faithful report to the brethren. **All of this presumes that a genuine interest in these things existed among the brethren in Colossae.** They had a vested interest in the work of the kingdom, and knew it. Consider what kind of interest would be found in such things in our day. **I fear**

All of this presumes that a genuine interest in these things existed among the brethren in Colossae. They had a vested interest in the work of the kingdom, and knew it. Consider what kind of interest would be found in such things in our day.

lengthy imprisonment. Paul enjoyed some remarkable liberty during this time, even though he was a prisoner.

At the commencement of this captivity, a chief captain named Lycius “commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him” (Acts 24:23). He was allowed the freedom of staying in his own hired house for two whole years. During that time he “received all that

the average church would rather attend a concert or have a family outing than hear what had been happening where kingdom laborers resided. Each of us can resolve to be more noted for an interest in kingdom matters, than the things pertaining to this world.

Also, think to yourself whom you would trust to give a faithful report of the activities in which you have involved yourself, where you have been residing.

ARISTARCHUS AND MARCUS

“¹⁰ *Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him.)*”

Do not fail to pick up on the nature of these references. **There is not so much as a syllable about the earthly qualifications of these**

brethren, or the size of their work, or the numbers of converts they had. It is not that such things are bad, and I am not for a moment suggesting that is the case. **There is a sense of priorities that is being communicated in these references to certain brethren.**

ARISTARCHUS

“*Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you . . .*”

Aristarchus is mentioned a few times in Scripture. We do not know much of him, except that he was a devoted worker with Paul the Apostle.

✚ He was from Macedonia, the Grecian part of the world, and was known as one of “Paul’s companions in travel” (Acts 19:29).

✚ He was among a company of seven

who accompanied Paul to Asia (Acts 20:4).

✚ He accompanied Paul to Rome, where Paul was carried by boat as a prisoner (Acts 27:2).

✚ He is known for being one of Paul's "fellowlaborers" (Phile 1:24).

This text informs us that

We know considerable about this brother. He surfaces rather early in the history of the church. He is John, whose surname was Mark (i.e. "John Mark").

✚ When the early church was praying for imprisoned Peter, they were in the house of John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12).

✚ When Barnabas and Saul returned

to go and visit the brethren in every city, Barnabas wanted to take Mark. Paul, however, did not think it wise, since Mark had "departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." This occasioned the separation of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-40).

✚ Some time later, Mark became more trustworthy. Paul then said he was "profitable" to him "for the ministry" (2 Tim 4:11).

✚ Peter refers to Mark as "my son" (1 Pet 5:13). We gather he was Peter's son in the faith.

✚ Since the middle of the second century, it has been generally assumed that this "Mark," or "Marcus" (the Greek form) was the writer of the Gospel of Mark.

Here is a disciple who recovered from being undependable, becoming profitable to Paul himself, and faithful in the work of the Lord. He stands as a noble example of overcoming the fleshly inclination to quit.

Aristarchus was also imprisoned with Paul, and was probably with Paul when he wrote this Epistle.

Even though Aristarchus had been seized in a tumult in Ephesus and treated maliciously (Acts 19:29), he faithfully continued with Paul in his troubles and afflictions. What a noble and consistent soul he was!

MARCUS

"... and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas." Other versions read, "Mark the cousin of Barnabas," ^{NKJV} and "Barnabas' cousin." ^{NIV}

from Jerusalem, they "took with them John, whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:25).

✚ When Barnabas and Saul preached the Word in the synagogues of the Jews in Salamis, Mark was their minister, helper, and assistant (Acts 13:5).

✚ When Paul and company came to Perga in Pamphylia, Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

✚ When Barnabas and Paul determined

Receive Him
 "... (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him.)" Other versions read, "about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him," ^{NKJV} "You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him," ^{NIV}

Here is a disciple who recovered from being undependable, becoming profitable to Paul himself, and faithful in the work of the Lord. **He stands as a noble example of overcoming the fleshly inclination to quit.** He came to a point where he was highly valued.

JESUS, CALLED JUSTUS

"¹¹ And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me."

JESUS, WHICH IS CALLED JUSTUS

"And Jesus, which is called Justus..."

The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the name "Joshua," and means "Jehovah is salvation." In Stephen's

defense of the faith, when referring to Joshua, the KJV uses the word "Jesus" (Acts 7:45). The book of Hebrews also refers to Joshua as "Jesus" (Heb 4:8). The same name is used in Luke 3:29, in the genealogy of our Lord. There the KJV uses the word "Joses," the ASV and BBE use "Jesus," while the other versions use "Joshua." In all three of these cases, the Greek word used is Ἰησοῦς (ee-ay-sooce), the same name ascribed to our Lord and Savior (Matt 1:21). In a sense, that could be very intimidating.

This brother was also called "Justus," which is a Latin name meaning "just" or "righteous." This would have been his Roman name. Other men identified with two names include "Thomas" ("which is called Didymus" (John 11:16), "John" ("whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:12), "Judas" ("surnamed Iscariot," Lk 22:3), "Joseph" ("called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus" (Acts 1:23), and "Simon" ("whose surname was Peter," Acts 10:5). The term "surnamed," used in the KJV,

means “was called,” and is so translated in most other versions.

It is generally understood that this name was common among the Jews until the time of the Lord Jesus, at which time it was generally discontinued because of the sanctity given to the name by the Savior. The name is considered to imply devotion to the Law of God.

We know nothing else of this brother. The only two things that are presently known of him are in this text: (1) He was a Jew (“*of the circumcision*”). (2) He labored with Paul (“*fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God*”). (3) He comforted Paul (“*which have been a comfort unto me*”). What a marvelous thing to be noted for only those three things! He was of the fleshly lineage of Abraham, as was the Savior. His work was for the kingdom of God. He was one who ministered comfort and encouragement to Paul himself.

OF THE CIRCUMCISION

“*who are of the circumcision. . .*” This description applies to a list of persons including Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus, “*which is called Justus.*” They were Jews, who are frequently called “*the circumcision*” (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom 3:30; 4:9,12; 15:8; Gal 2:7,8,9,12; Eph 2:11; Tit 1:10). However, these were not merely Jews, but were among that holy remnant who are, in the true spiritual sense, “*THE circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil 3:3).

A considerable number of the Jews had become opponents of the Gospel (Acts 15:1,24; Gal 2:4; 5:1-4; Phil 3:2; 2 Cor 11:24; 1 Thess 2:14-15; Tit 1:10). **However, here was a holy cluster of elect ones, numbered among the holy remnant, who were Jews “inwardly,” and were also circumcised in their hearts, and in the spirits** (Rom 2:29). We must be able to comprehend the magnitude of Divine grace that is evidenced in this group of people. It is possible for a few godly to be found amongst a mass of ungodly – like Lot in Sodom, Joseph in Egypt, Nehemiah in Persia, and Daniel in Babylon.

THE ONLY ONES

“*These only are my fellow*

workers.” Other versions read, “*my only fellow workers,*”^{NKJV} “*These are the only Jews among my fellow workers,*”^{NIV} “*These are the only men of the circumcision,*”^{RSV} “*these only are my helpers,*”^{DOUAY} “*Of all those who have come over from the circumcision, these are the only ones actually working with me,*”^{NJB} “*These are the only Jewish Christians among my coworkers.*”^{NLT}

Here is a most remarkable circumstance – particularly when you consider how many Jews had been converted. On the day of Pentecost, a harvest of three thousand devout Jews was realized (Acts 2:41). A short time later, many more Jews believed, “*and the number of the men was about five thousand*” (Acts 4:14). Within a short time “*a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6:7). When Dorcas was raised from the dead in Joppa, “*many believed in the Lord*” (Acts 9:42). In a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, a “*multitude*” of Jews believed (Acts 14:1). Later in the book of Acts, James pointed out to Paul, “*Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law*” (Acts 21:20).

We must be able to comprehend the magnitude of Divine grace that is evidenced in this group of people. It is possible for a few godly to be found amongst a mass of ungodly – like Lot in Sodom, Joseph in Egypt, Nehemiah in Persia, and Daniel in Babylon.

Yet, from this mass of Jewish believers, there were only three who were laboring with Paul at that time: Aristarchus, Mark, and “*Jesus, which is called Justus.*” This was, then, a time during Paul’s ministry when personal fellowship from his “*kinsmen according to the flesh*” was especially sparse. **Yet, his spirit was buoyant, his heart full, and his ministry flourishing.**

The effect of godly brethren is not dependent upon how many there are of them, but how faithful they are. It is

“*good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity,*” even if it is “*two of three*” (Matt 18:20).

UNTO THE KINGDOM

“*. . . unto the kingdom of God. . .*”

Other versions read, “*for the kingdom of God,*”^{NKJV} “*in the kingdom of God,*”^{DOUAY} “*to the kingdom of God,*”^{RWB} and “*for the reign of God.*”^{YLT}

What does it mean to be “*fellow workers unto the kingdom of God?*” The word “*unto*” means “*into, towards, for, or among.*”^{THAYER} “*Motion toward a place . . . with as view to, for this reason.*”^{FRIBERG} The Kingdom of God is what they preached – that is, the focus and result of God’s working. Their labors had to do with focusing upon what the God had purposed, and what He was doing. They joined with Paul in his labors, of whom it is said, “*he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening*” (Acts 28:23). And again, “*And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the*

Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

These men were promoting the honor and interest of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not promoting Jewry or some Christian sect. They were not advancing a human agenda, or swelling the numbers or fame of a particular sectarian group.

Righteousness, Peace, and Joy

The Spirit molds our thinking by this expression concerning the Kingdom of God: “*For the kingdom of God is not*

meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). Those who are working "unto the Kingdom of God" are promoting these inner spiritual qualities. They are bringing them within the reach of the people, and advancing them in those who believe.

You cannot proceduralize righteousness, peace, and joy. You cannot build them with worldly wisdom, or develop a routine that promotes them.

some, these words are most confusing. Such have grown so accustomed to institutional agendas and human interpretations that they cannot even think in terms of "the kingdom of God." That is too generic for them, and does not narrow matters down fine enough. **What they forget is that there are really only two kingdoms.** The one that is being governed by the exalted Christ, and the one over which Satan presides.

A COMFORT UNTO ME

You cannot build a name on them, or found an organization upon them. They do not blend with the wisdom of this world, nor can any person capitalize upon them for personal advantage. Yet, these have to do with the Kingdom of God.

They are "in the Holy Spirit" – i.e. only He can administer and culture these virtues. Neither, indeed, do any of them contribute to institutionalism. You cannot build a name on them, or found an organization upon them. They do not blend with the wisdom of this world, nor can any person capitalize upon them for personal advantage. Yet, these have to do with the Kingdom of God. Where they are found, God's Kingdom is being made known, and is among the people.

It should not surprise you that such men are even more rare today than they were during the time of this text. For

" . . . which have been a comfort unto me." Other versions read, "they have proved to be a comfort to me,"^{NKJV} "they have proved to be an encouragement to me,"^{NASB} "who have been a consolation to me,"^{DARBY} "And what a comfort they have been,"^{NLT} and "who did become a comfort to me."^{YLT}

People are comforted when they are made stronger in the Lord, gaining strength to finish the race that has been placed before them (Heb 12:2). Thus the debilitating effects of spiritual warfare are decidedly neutralized, and the heart is encouraged.

Determination, confidence, and assurance, grow when a person is comforted. The enemy becomes smaller, and circumstances are less threatening. **Whatever trials may loom before the person who is comforted he feels equal to them, and is not intimidated by them.**

It is tragic, yet true, that many professing Christians are nothing more than sources of discouragement and concern. They cause "heaviness of and continual sorrow of heart," as Israel did to Paul (Rom 9:2). When Paul confronted the church at Corinthian, he had to determine within himself not to come to them again "in heaviness" (2 Cor 2:1). **For a while, their condition was more of a weight to Paul than an encouragement.** On one occasion he wrote to them, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor 11:3).

Ponder the effects of the Galatian church upon Paul. "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain" (Gal 4:11).

O, the blessing of comforters, who leave us stronger, encouraged, and more determined to dwell forever in the courts of the Lord! May you be one who is a comfort to those who are laboring "unto the kingdom of God" – whose interests have been shaped in the crucible of Divine fellowship, not the halls of sectarianism and institutionalism! Such people are jewels in the eyes of the Lord.

EPAPHRAS

"¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis."

EPHAPHRAS

"Epaphras . . ." The name Epaphras means "lovely," and that is certainly an appropriate description of this dear brother. He is mentioned by this name three times in Scripture, and with the most wonderful associations.

learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant."

✚ Colossians 1:7 – **OUR DEAR FELLOW SERVANT:** "As ye also

✚ Colossians 1:7 – **A FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST:** ". . . who is for you a faithful minister of Christ."

✚ Colossians 4:12 – **A SERVANT OF CHRIST:** "Epaphras, who is one of

you, a servant of Christ."

✚ Colossians 4:12 – **LABORING FERVENTLY IN PRAYERS:** *"always laboring fervently for you in prayers."*

✚ Colossians 4:13 – **ZEALOUS:** *"For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis."*

✚ Philemon 1:23 – **FELLOW PRISONER:** *"There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus."*

We learn from this man that disciples can be distinguished for their faithfulness and labors. That distinction, however, requires extraordinary effort and faith. That is precisely why such souls are given special recognition in the inspired writings.

ONE OF YOU

"... who is one of you ..." This same thing was said of Onesimus, and indicates that Epaphras also labored among the Colossian brethren. Some have objected to forming an identity with a particular group of people, saying that such identity is not necessary. It is sufficient, they say, to be part of the church at large. Such reasoning is flawed to the core, and does not reflect sound thinking or speaking.

When Saul of Tarsus was converted, he came to Jerusalem and *"tried to join the disciples"* ^{NKJV} (Acts 9:26). Onesimus and Epaphras were particularly part of the Colossian fellowship (Col 4:9, 12). There are a number of brethren mentioned in Scripture who had churches in their houses (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile 1:2). Corinth was told to expel from among themselves those brethren who were immoral (1 Cor 5:2-11). They were also challenged to consider if there was a wise man among them (1 Cor 6:5). There were those among the Galatians who especially ministered in the power of the Spirit (Gal 3:5). The Thessalonians had some among them who were walking disorderly (2 Thess 3:11).

All of these references presume some form of regular identity with the

people. This identity is reflected in most intimate language: *"members one of another"* (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). A local congregation is body of people that relate to one another in both faith and ministry. Those who shun such relationships are conducting their lives in contradiction of the very nature of the Kingdom.

Epaphras was *"one"* of the Colossian brethren by regular association,

yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Rom 6:16). A *"servant of Christ"* is someone who has been *"made free from sin,"* has now *"become servants to God,"* has *"fruit unto holiness,"* and in the end will have *"eternal life"* (Rom 6:22).

Satan has promoted the idea

Serving Christ involves doing His bidding, and joining Him as a co-laborer. It means Christ's agenda is adopted, and the individual enters into a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

not by an impersonal or formal identity. This will become apparent when Paul refers to what he did.

A SERVANT OF CHRIST

"... a servant of Christ, saluteth you ..." Other versions read, *"a bondservant of Christ,"* ^{NKJV} *"a bonds slave of Jesus Christ."* ^{NASB}

Serving Christ involves doing His bidding, and joining Him as a co-laborer. It means Christ's agenda is adopted, and the individual enters into a life that is pleasing to the Lord. Jesus said of those who serve Him: *"If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor"* (John 12:26).

One of the strategies of the devil has been to distort the vocabulary of the Spirit. If he cannot promote his own vocabulary as a substitute, he will attempt to corrupt the meaning of words used by the Holy Spirit. One expression he has targeted is *"servant of Christ."* In the Spirit, a *"servant of Christ"* is a voluntary bonds slave – one who is bound to do the will of his Master. He is like the servant of Exodus 21:1-6, who chose to remain with His master, doing his bidding instead of pursuing personal interests. **Everyone is a servant to someone,** for *"to whom ye*

that serving a religious institution, doing its bidding, and promoting its agenda, is "serving Christ." Such a view has no regard for *"righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."* Nor, indeed, does it rely upon the leading and administration of the Spirit (Gal 5:18; 1 Cor 12:4-6), learning Christ (Eph 4:20), or hearing Christ's voice (John 10:27).

ALWAYS LABORING FERVENTLY FOR YOU

"... always laboring fervently for you in prayers ..." Other versions read, *"always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers,"* ^{NASB} *"He is always wrestling in prayer for you,"* ^{NIV} *"always remembering you earnestly in his prayers,"* ^{RSV} *"always combating earnestly for you in prayers,"* ^{DARBY} *"always struggling on your behalf in his prayers,"* ^{ESV} and *"never stops battling for you."* ^{NJB}

The expression *"laboring fervently"* is unusually strong. The single word translated *"laboring fervently"* is ἀγωνίζομενος "to enter a contest, contend with adversaries, fight, and endeavor with strenuous zeal, strive to obtain something." ^{THAYER} "Strive earnestly, make every effort, try very hard." ^{FRIEBERG} "Struggle, fight, do one's best, compete." ^{UBS} "To engage in intense struggle, involving physical or nonphysical force against strong opposition – to struggle, to fight." ^{LOUW-NIDA} "To contend for victory." ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} This is a term that describes intense inner activity.

Epaphras, then, was engaged in a battle for the Colossians, and the arena in which he was fighting the battle was prayer. This is the very thing that is depicted in the book of Ephesians, where the brethren are admonished to “*put on the whole armor of God,*” because we are wrestling “*against*

Philemon (Phile 1:2). He does not pray that they will have successful programs, or that they will reach their community, or that their missions programs will be successful. None of these things are wrong, and that is not the point. If the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to do the will of God, it is going to have to stand

of God would be like this? Or, better yet, how many have you heard suggest that they can and should be like this?

Salvation Produces These Things

First, salvation is calculated to produce these results: spiritual maturity and confidence in “*all the will of God.*” So far as this world is concerned, that is the targeted outcome of “*the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tim 2:10). If this does not happen, nothing else really counts. **There is nothing – absolutely nothing – that can compensate for a failure to grow up and have confidence in all the will of God.** What is even more, where these are lacking, people are vulnerable to the “*old serpent.*” **The further a person is from spiritual maturity and the full assurance that comes with it, the closer they are to the precipice of eternal ruin.** If that seems strong, believe me when I say it is not strong enough. That is precisely why Epaphras labored fervently in prayers for the Colossians.

The Intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit

The Word of God affirms we have an Intercessor at the right hand of God, and One within as well. “*Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:25). This is a reference to the exalted Christ, for we are coming to God “*by Him.*” He is saving His people “*to the uttermost,*” or completely, by making intercession for them.

From within, the Spirit is working in our behalf also. “*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God*” (Rom 8:27). The Holy Spirit is interceding for us “*according to the will of God.*” That is, He is working to bring us into conformity with that will, that we might stand “*perfect and complete*” in all of it.

The prayers of Epaphras were in perfect accord with the

We will see now the objective of these militant prayers. There is a certain focus in them that will elude those who walk in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). After identifying that armor, the Spirit says, “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*” (Eph 6:18). This is exactly what Epaphras is not only doing, but doing “*always*” – consistently and faithfully.

We will see now the objective of these militant prayers. There is a certain focus in them that will elude those who walk in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

PERFECT AND COMPLETE

“*. . . that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*” Other versions read, “*perfect and fully assured in all the will of God,*”^{NASB} “*that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured,*”^{NIV} “*stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills,*”^{NRSV} “*complete and fully certain of all the purpose of God,*”^{BBE} “*that you will never lapse but always hold perfectly and securely to the will of God,*”^{NJB} and “*asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident of the whole will of God.*”^{NLT}

Observe that Epaphras does not pray that the Colossian church would flourish numerically – for there is every indication they were relatively small, perhaps even meeting in the house of

“*perfect and complete*” in that will. **An immature church trying to do the will of the Lord is like a toddler trying to cut down a tree with a chain saw.**

The words “*perfect and complete*” are the Spirit’s way of referring to maturity, or growing up into Christ “*in all things*” (Eph 4:15). It is when the saints are “*men*” in their “*understanding*” (1 Cor 14:20). This is when believers are “*stablished in the Lord*” (Col 2:7), and are no longer “*unstable*” in all their ways (James 1:8). A mature believer is one who possesses “*the full assurance of faith*” (Heb 10:22), “*the full assurance of hope*” (Heb 6:11), and “*the full assurance of understanding*” (Col 2:2).

It is no wonder Epaphras did spiritual battle in his prayers, struggling against principalities and powers who were fighting to restrain such supplications! Ponder the magnitude of these expressions: “*perfect and complete,*” “*all the will of God,*” “*fully assured,*” “*stand firm,*” “*mature,*” “*fully certain,*” “*never lapse,*” “*hold perfectly,*” “*fully confident,*” and “*the whole will of God.*”

Consider how many people you personally know who can be described in those words. There are large and impressive congregations who, at the very best, have only a few souls who could be described in this way. When have you ever heard of someone praying that the people

intercession of Jesus, and the intercession of the Holy Spirit. It is especially in this sense that he was a “*servant of Christ*,” serving the interests and objectives of the Lord.

Summary Thought

Behold with what great difficulty spiritual maturity is obtained. It requires the hearty effort of the saints themselves (2 Pet 3:18). It requires the prayers of the saints around them (Eph 6:18). The intercession of Jesus is essential (Heb 7:25). The intercession of the Holy Spirit is required as well (Rom 8:26-27).

It is not possible for a child of God to grow up in a realm of casualness, or where one is exposed to the good things of God infrequently. Those who have championed convenient, brief, and infrequent religion have cut off the hands and feet of the people of God. Those who flood the church with extracurricular activities do the same. Such people betray their abysmal ignorance of the very nature of spiritual life.

Given the religious environment in which we are living, we could well do with an army of Epaphras’s, who will do spiritual battle in their prayers for the maturity and stabilization of the saints of the Living God. **How sorely spiritual adulthood is needed in the American church!** However, it is not apt to happen on any measurable scale until those who see the need for the church growing up into Christ begin wrestling in prayer for that to take place.

There are staggering forces aligned against the church, and they love the froth to which she has given herself. However, where there are insightful souls willing to do battle for the body of Christ, genuine progress **will** be made.

A GREAT ZEAL

¹³ *For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.”*

I bear him record

Other versions read, “*I bear him witness*,” ^{NKJV} “*I vouch for him*,” ^{NIV} “*I testify for him*,” ^{NRSV} and “*I can assure you*.” ^{NLT}

Paul had witnessed the conduct of Epaphras first hand, and thus confirms the truth of what he now says. Solomon wisely said, “*Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips*” (Prov 27:2). That is precisely what we have in this text. Paul is bearing witness to the excellent qualities and practices of Epaphras.

He hath a great zeal for you

Other versions read, “*he has a deep concern for you*,” ^{NASB} “*he is working hard for you*,” ^{NIV} “*he has undergone much trouble for you*,” ^{BEB} “*he labors much for you*,” ^{DARBY} and “*he has agonized for you*.” ^{NLT}

the disciples saw the aggressiveness with which the Lord cleansed the Temple, they “*remembered that it was written, ‘The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up’*” (John 2:17; Psa 69:9). Speaking of the coming Messiah, Isaiah prophesied, “*For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak*” (Isa 59:17). The zeal of Epaphras confirmed that he had a lot of Jesus, and was abiding in Him.

Those at Laodicea and Hierapolis

Together with Colossae, these cities formed a sort of tri-city complex, with Colossae being situated between

It is not possible for a child of God to grow up in a realm of casualness, or where one is exposed to the good things of God infrequently. Those who have championed convenient, brief, and infrequent religion have cut off the hands and feet of the people of God.

The word “*zeal*” means “*excitement of mind, ardour, fervor of spirit*.” Some versions place the emphasis upon the result of the zeal rather than the zeal itself: i.e. “*working hard*,” and “*labors much*.” This slight variation is owing to the presence of two differing Greek texts. For those with an interest in such things, one employs the phrase ζήλον πολὺν, which is translated “*great zeal*.” The other Greek text uses the phrase πολὺν πόνον, which is translated “*hard work*.” Doctrinally, there is no difference in the meaning of the text. The zeal is what Epaphras had, the labor is how he employed it.

The real point of Paul’s commendation is that Epaphras was aggressive in seeking the welfare of the Colossian brethren. He toiled in prayer, seeking for them to “*stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*.”

Zeal

Like our blessed Savior, he was consumed with the zeal of the Lord. When

them.

Laodicea

This was the capital of Phrygia, and not far from Colossae. Early in this Epistle, Paul mentioned the church at Laodicea. “*For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh*” (Col 2:1). Later he will charge the brethren in Colossae to have their Epistle read to the Laodiceans, and to see to it that they read the Epistle sent to the Laodiceans: “*And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea*” (Col 4:16).

Several years after this Epistle was written, the Lord Jesus had John deliver a special word to the church at Laodicea. At that time, it was the only church, concerning which, Jesus had nothing good to say. In fact, he told them,

because of their lukewarmness, He was about to spue them out of His mouth (Rev 3:14;16). Their condition was inexcusable! Paul had written a letter to them. They had heard the reading of the Epistle send to the Colossians. **Additionally, they had in Epaphras a noble man who travailed in prayer for them, seeking that they stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.**

Sin is a terrible thing, seeing it can so dull the heart and conscience that such hearty efforts are all in vain – efforts expended by godly men.

Hierapolis

This city was also in Phrygia, and was not far from Colossae and Laodicea. It was a city given to idolatry, with Apollo, Diana, Aesculpius, and Hygeia being their chief gods. ^{CLARKE} The city contained numerous temples to all of these “vanities.”

This is the only mention of this church in Scripture – **a body of believers for whom a godly man travailed in prayer for their perfection and stability. That is reason enough to spark our interest.**

One last note

This special commendation of Epaphras is no doubt owing to the fact that this was the man who had apprised Paul of the conditions at Colossae. Perhaps some of the brethren were tempted to regard Epaphras with some contempt, seeing that he had blown the whistle on them, so to speak. **However, Epaphras was not seeking his own benefit in his report and his labors. Rather, he was seeking the growth and maturity of the people of God. In that desire, he was a laborer together with God.**

LUKE AND DEMAS

“¹⁴ *Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*”

LUKE

“Luke, the beloved physician . . .”

We know from Paul’s previous reference to the “only” Jews who were laboring

Theophilus. There is no record of him. We assume that Luke’s reference to him as “*most excellent Theophilus*” suggests he occupied some high political office. However, that is only conjecture.

What Luke Says About Himself

Throughout church history, there have been those who have denigrated doctors as though, in Christ Jesus, health was guaranteed. Those who have embraced this teaching declare that healing is in the atonement, and that Jesus on the cross, had our sicknesses laid upon Him.

with him, that Luke was a Gentile – not reckoned among “*the circumcision.*”

We know nothing of Luke’s conversion, or of his past life. He did write two of the larger books of the New Covenant writings: Luke (24 chapters) and Acts (28 chapters). Out of the 260 chapters of Matthew through Revelation, 52 of them were written by Luke – a staggering 20%. **It appears that he is also the only Gentile who wrote Scripture.**

Both of his books were written to

Being a man of integrity and insight, it will be profitable to know what Luke said about himself. We have only one testimony from him.

✚ In the Gospel Luke that wrote, he affirmed he was **not** an eye witness of Christ’s ministry, yet he had a “*perfect understanding of all things from the very first*” – that is, of the things pertaining relating to what Jesus “*began both to do and teach*” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

References in the Book of Acts

There are some things we can conclude about Luke from the book of Acts.

- ✚ In his narrative of the book of Acts, Luke first associates himself with Paul in Acts 16:10-11, when the Spirit led Paul to Macedonia.
- ✚ He again associates himself with Paul in Acts 20:5-6, when they sailed from Philippi to Troas.
- ✚ He appears to have been Paul’s constant companion from their reunion in Phillipi and during his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6-21:18).
- ✚ He sailed with Paul to Rome (Acts 27:1).
- ✚ He was shipwrecked with Paul on the isle called Melita (Acts 28:1-2).
- ✚ He traveled with Paul by Syracuse and Puteoli to Rome (Acts 28:12-16).
- ✚ It appears that he remained with Paul in Rome (Col 4:14; Phile 1:24).

Paul’s Reference to Timothy

✚ At one point when Paul was imprisoned, “*only Luke*” was with him (2 Tim 4:11).

Our Text

In our text we learn something

additional about Luke. He was a physician – not merely a physician, but a “beloved physician.” Other versions read, “Luke the doctor,”^{NIV} “well-loved medical friend,”^{BBE} and “Doctor Luke.”^{NLT} The definite article is in the text, so that it properly reads, “THE beloved physician,” or “our dear friend Luke, THE doctor.” Luke, then, excelled in two areas. First, as beloved, or very precious, in the Lord – an unusual disciple. Second, as a physician – THE physician, or one who was surpassing in that profession. Further, the word used here indicates that he was a surgeon, physician, and dispenser of medicines.^{CLARKE}

Throughout church history, there have been those who have denigrated doctors as though, in Christ Jesus, health was guaranteed. **Those who have embraced this teaching declare that healing is in the atonement, and that Jesus on the cross, had our sicknesses laid upon Him.** This is a fine point of their doctrine, coupled together with Isaiah’s expression, “with His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24).

It is especially important to be clear on this matter, for the death of Christ is one of the pivotal declarations of Scripture. We cannot afford to be wrong about the purpose and impact of that death. If, in fact, there is bodily healing “in the atonement,” it will clearly stated in Scripture. **This cannot be a teaching that is derived by human reasoning.** There is no such thing as a valid doctrine that is only supported by human reasoning. **Truth is undergirded by Divine affirmation, not supposition, conjecture, or logical hypotheses.**

There are several things about this view that do not mesh with Apostolic doctrine concerning the death of Christ.

✚ First, If healing is, in fact, in the atonement, and bodily health is guaranteed in Jesus, I cannot conceive of a physician being called “beloved physician” by the one who most clearly articulated the significance of Christ’s death. A physician uses medicine, which conflicts with healing being in the atonement.

✚ Second, Christ’s death is said to have been “for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), “for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), and “for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament” (Heb 9:15). Never is it said to have been for our sicknesses.

✚ Third, the Spirit applied the Scripture concerning Jesus bearing our sicknesses to His earthly ministry, not His death on the cross. Following the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, it is written, “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were

be sin” (2 C or 5: 21), and a “curse” as well (Gal 3:13). There is a single reference to the scourging of Jesus by Pilate in Scripture. It is found in John 19:1: “Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him.” Jesus Himself foretold that He would be “scourged” (Matt 20:19; Mk 10:34; Lk 18:33). There is no question about the severity of that scourging, which fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isa 50:6). Isaiah also said, “As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men”

there is nothing about sickness that alienates a person from God. It requires no atoning death. Sickness does not necessitate a reconciliation, and is nowhere so represented.

sick” (Matt 8:16). This was not only a magnificent display of Divine power, but of mercy and love as well. In providing an explanation for this magnanimous work, the Spirit said, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matt 8:17).

✚ Fourth, there is nothing about sickness that alienates a person from God. It requires no atoning death. Sickness does not necessitate a reconciliation, and is nowhere so represented.

✚ Fifth, the redemption the body is categorically said to take place at the resurrection, not at the cross (Rom 8:23; Eph 12:14).

✚ Sixth, the stripes by which we are healed are not those administered by the order of Pilate. Rather, it is what God did to Jesus that delivered us. He was “smitten of God and afflicted” (Isa 53:4). It was God who “delivered Him up” (Rom 8:32), making Him “to

(Isa 52:14). Yet, neither the prophets, Jesus, nor the Apostles clearly connected that scourging with the healing of the body.

✚ Seventh, no person was ever rebuked for being sick. There are instances where people were made sick because of their sin, such as in the case of the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:30).

✚ Eighth, Paul indicates that Timothy, an unusually godly young man, was chronically ill. “No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments”^{NASB} (1 Tim 5:23). If healing is in the atonement, Timothy’s condition would be evidence of unbelief. Yet Paul said of him, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” (Phil 2:20).

✚ Ninth, rather than sickness being a curse for which Jesus had to die, the Galatians received the Gospel because of Paul’s infirmity: “but you know that it was because of a bodily

illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time"^{NASB} (Gal 4:13).

I therefore am persuaded that Luke was a *"beloved physician"* because he used his occupation to especially minister to Paul himself. I also affirm that such a designation could not be possible if Jesus died to give us soundness of bodily health.

Thus Paul says that Luke sends greetings to the brethren at Colossae – beloved Luke, who accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys, accompanied him to Rome, and remained there with him until he was released (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:8; 27:1-28:16). He was also with Paul during his second

imprisonment in Rome (2 Tim 4:11). Truly, one of the Apostle's most trusted and beneficial companions.

DEMAS

"... and Demas, greet you."

We know very little about Demas. He was with Paul during the time Colossians and Philemon were written (Phile 1:24). At that time, he was apparently faithfully serving the Lord.

The other reference to Demas puts him in sharp contrast with faithful Luke: *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica"* (2 Tim 4:10). Like John Mark much earlier, Demas

"went not with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). Rather, Paul tells Timothy, he *"loved this present world,"* preferring it to laboring in the Kingdom. Perhaps Demas could not stand the dangers that attended Paul's ministry. **He is the only person about whom Paul had nothing more to say.** He said something more about Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus who is called Justus, Epaphras, and Luke. **Perhaps there were already indications of Demas' instability.** However, that is all conjecture. It is enough to observe that Demas represents the kind of disciple you do not want to be. He was with Paul, but nothing more is said about the occasion. It is assumed that he fell from a steadfast state.

LAODICEAN BRETHREN AND NYMPHAS

"¹⁵ Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house."

Those who are in Christ Jesus are members of *"the whole family in heaven*

greetings from himself and those with him to the brethren in Colossae – a practice in which he was consistent (Rom 16:5-21; 1 Cor 16:19-20; 2 Cor 13:13; Phil 4:21,22; 1 Thess 5:26; 2 Tim 4:19; Tit 3:15; Phile 1:23).

- ✚ Epaphras had a great zeal for this church (4:13).
- ✚ Paul sent his greetings to the brethren in Laodicea (4:15).
- ✚ They were to have the Epistle to the Colossians read to them (4:16).
- ✚ Paul had also written them an Epistle (4:16).

In the time between the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians and the writing of the Revelation, this church had so degenerated that nothing good could be said about it.

The *"brethren in Laodicea,"* therefore, had every reason to excel. Paul was wrestling for them. Epaphras was zealous for them. Paul had written a special letter to them. The Epistle to the Colossians was read to them. Those all provided an excellent incentive for them to grow up into Christ in all things.

and earth," which is named after Christ (Eph 3:15). They are *"members every one of another"* (Rom 12:5), and are *"brethren"* (1 Pet 1:22). There is a very real and effectual association that is realized when one is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13). **It is more than a formal connection.** There is a sharing of both joys and sorrows (Rom 12:15). There is also mutual edification in which the various members assist one another (1 Thess 5:11).

This is why Paul is careful to send

BRETHREN IN LAODICEA

"Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea..." This is also a congregation about which we know very little. Its origin is not known. It is only mentioned in the books of Colossians and the Revelation. In Colossians, the references are as follows.

- ✚ Paul was having a great inner struggle for this church, as well as the one in Colossae (2:1). He was travailing for them (Gal 4:19). We conclude, therefore that at that time they were encountering some of the same challenges.

However, this is not what happened. About 30-35 years after Colossians was written, the glorified Christ sent a message to this church. Its condition at that time was anything but admirable. **In the time between the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians and the writing of the Revelation, this church had so degenerated that nothing good could be said about it.** Jesus provided the true assessment of *"the church of the*

Laodiceans."

- ✚ They were neither cold nor hot (Rev 3:15).
- ✚ They were lukewarm (Rev 3:16a).
- ✚ Because of their condition, Jesus was going to spue them out of His mouth (3:16b).
- ✚ They said they were rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing (Rev 3:17a).
- ✚ They did not know they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17b).
- ✚ Jesus counseled them to buy true gold from Him so they would be rich (Rev 3:18a).
- ✚ Jesus counseled them to obtain white raiment from Him so they would be clothed, and their shameful nakedness would not appear (Rev 3:18b).
- ✚ Jesus counseled them anoint their eyes with eyesalve so they could see (Rev 3:18c).
- ✚ Jesus told them to be zealous, and repent (3:19).
- ✚ Jesus stood outside of their church, knocking, and searching for a single person who would hear His voice (Rev 3:20).

The "*church of the Laodiceans*" would probably be featured in the religious magazines of our day. They had all of the marks of a successful organization, seeing themselves as having no need. **However, several decades before Jesus said He was going to disown them, the seeds of moral and**

spiritual corruption were already at work. Paul sensed it and carried a great burden for them. Epaphras saw it, and was zealous for their advancement. It appears as though their labor was in vain – a circumstance that Paul feared (2 Cor 11:3; Gal 4:11).

When the Spirit speaks of spiritual leaders who "*watch for your souls,*" **He is speaking of men like Paul and Epaphras, who behold the beginnings of iniquity, and set themselves to stop its spread.** These are men who have been made overseers by the Holy Spirit, "*to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28). This text is a sterling example of that kind of care and nurture.

NYPHAS

"... and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." This is the only mentioning of Nymphas in the

When the Spirit speaks of spiritual leaders who "watch for your souls," He is speaking of men like Paul and Epaphras, who behold the beginnings of iniquity, and set themselves to stop its spread.

Scriptures. And even here, we only know one thing about this person: a body of believers was meeting in his house. That is, however, a most excellent recommendation, setting him apart from most others.

Some have surmised that all of the brethren in Laodicea met in the house of Nymphas. Others understand him to have lived on the outskirts of the city, while Philemon was the most prominent among them, with his house being the main place of meeting. All of this is of no real

consequence. The fact of the matter is that some brethren were assembling in the house of Nymphas, for the word "*church*" means "assembly."

Something to Note

Here is something to be noted: the early church was not at all what people now conceive a church to be. **Today impression ranks high on the religious scale:** An educated staff, an impressive structure, a glittering program, an effective outreach, extracurricular activities, etc. A "*church*" meeting in a "*house*" is nearly held in disdain. There are several people in Scripture who are noted for having churches in their homes: Priscilla and Aquilla (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19), Nymphas (Col 4:15), and Philemon.

The presence of these groups confirms the seriousness of early disciples. They saw a need for assembling together, edifying one

another, and expressing their faith. Too, Paul, the premier Apostle with a superior understanding of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, recognized these house gatherings. **They were worthy of comfort, exhortation, and edification.**

That, of course, is the very manner in which our blessed Lord thinks. The Kingdom of God does not focus upon impressive organizations, but upon those who are joined to the Lord – those who are growing up into Christ in all things.

WHEN THIS EPISTLE IS READ

"¹⁶ And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise

read the epistle from Laodicea."

Among the people of God, the Word of God carries a certain priority.

The words of a person inspired by God are seen as a vehicle for grace and truth that will yield edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 14:3).

There is a sense in which every child of God is unique, with a unique role in the body of Christ – by Given O. Blakely

READ AMONG YOU

“And when this epistle is read among you . . .”

Paul is counting on this Epistle being read to the whole church – young and old. He does not send a special messenger to the youth, married, single, senior, etc. **Truth is not tailored for certain ages, but for those who have faith.** While this is a matter of particular concern to me, I will say this one word. We are living in a time when undue attention is being given to young people. They are, we are told, “the church of tomorrow,” even though **no such thing is taught or insinuated in the Word of God.** Christian young people are part

That is the sort of circumstance that is before us. Tychicus brings this Epistle from Paul, and reading it “among” the brethren is the first thing to be done.

For those who champion the watering down of truth so as to make it more palatable, consider what Paul has affirmed in this Epistle. These are things to which all the brethren were to be exposed.

- ✚ The commendation of their faith in Christ and love for the brethren (1:4).
- ✚ A prayer for them to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (1:9).

being reconciled to God (1:20-24).1

- ✚ A declaration of the mystery that had been hidden from the foundation of the world (1:25-29).
- ✚ An affirmation of the completeness that is realized in Christ (2:1-10).
- ✚ A exposition of what occurred when we were baptized into Christ (2:11-15).
- ✚ A warning not to allow anyone to judge us in regard to things that are only a shadow of what is possessed in Christ (2:16-17).
- ✚ A warning about the possibility of being deceived by a form, of religion that has no power (2:18-23).
- ✚ A summons to bring our lives into conformity with the will of God (3:1-4:6). This included the management of our preferences and affection. It also involved the subordination of fleshly tendencies, and the culturing of spiritual virtues. The Word of Christ is to dwell in us richly, and everything we do is to be done in the name of the Lord.

Paul is counting on this Epistle being read to the whole church – young and old. He does not send a special messenger to the youth, married, single, senior, etc. Truth is not tailored for certain ages, but for those who have faith.

of the church of today! They are to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). At some point, they must be able to sit and hear what the Apostle says to the whole church. That is how it was in Colossae, and that is how it is to be today.

In the days of Jehosaphat, the people gathered together “to ask help of the Lord.” The children of Moab and the children of Ammon had come up against them, and it did not look good. Jehosaphat “feared, and set himself to seek the Lord.” The people all rallied, coming together to obtain help from God. It is written, “And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (2 Chron 20:13). As they stood before the Lord, in the middle of the congregation, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, “a Levite of the sons of Asaph.” He then delivered a weighty prophesy to “all Judah . . . with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (2 Chron 20:1-17).

- ✚ A prayer that they will walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (1:10).
- ✚ A prayer that they would be strengthened with all might according to God’s glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness (1:11).
- ✚ An affirmation that God has qualified us to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light (1:12).
- ✚ A declaration that God has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, redeeming and forgiving us (1:13-14).
- ✚ A powerful declaration of the nature, work, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus (1:15-19).
- ✚ A delineation of the involvements of

Today there are whole generations of believers who are never submitted to such teaching. The manner of teaching that they receive has caused the truth to have a strange sound to such people.

Progress in the faith begins with exposure to the mind of the Lord. That exposure comes exclusively through the Word of God by which we live. As it is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4). Only the Word can penetrate the citadel of the human spirit and make manifest the counsels of the heart. Thus it is written, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). **If ever the saints of God are going to be equipped to live for and be used by God, they must be exposed to His Word.** As it is written,

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

This, and much more, is why Paul had his letters read to the brethren. They were not sent to the leaders alone, but to the brethren. They were not directives to “the minister,” but to the whole congregation. This is a kingdom manner. In my judgment, as soon as a ministry is limited to a segment of the body of Christ, it at once becomes irrelevant.

CAUSE IT TO BE READ ALSO

“ . . . cause that it be read also in

- ✚ That the brethren were accustomed to meeting together.
- ✚ That what Paul wrote applied to both groups.
- ✚ That we can profit by what the Lord says to other people.
- ✚ That there is blessing in cooperation and unity.
- ✚ That all believers have things pertaining to salvation in common.

Truth is something designed for all the saints of God. Its nature is to liberate and make free (John 8:32). When it is spoken “in love,” it makes for

some to affirm this was a letter written by the Laodiceans – perhaps to Paul. This, however, is a foolish conjecture, and does not blend with the rest of this text. Why would Paul tell the Colossians to see to it that HIS letter to them was read by the Laodiceans, and that THEIR letter to him was to be read by the Colossians?

The meaning is that someone was bringing a letter sent to the Laodiceans to Colossae, and the brethren there were to read it. In other words, they were to exchange letters, realizing profit from both of them. The NASB projects this meaning. *“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.”*^{NASB}

On one occasion, Paul shared the perception that some had of his letters. *“For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful”* (2 Cor 10:10). Indeed, there are few students of Scripture who have not made this same observation at some time. His expositions of inner warfare (Rom 7:14-23), justification (Rom 4), the humiliation of Jesus (Phil 2:5-8), his personal objectives (Phil 3:7-14), and the High Priesthood of Jesus (Heb 5-10), are lofty in every sense of the word.

However, as this Epistle suggests, such things are not to be ignored because they are “weighty,” or “deep.” In fact, that is all the more reason why we are to be exposed to such things. **You cannot produce mature and stable believers with rudiments and theological simplicity.**

May God hasten the day when the cry for spiritual meat rises from the church – when men are no longer content to be “unskillful in the word or righteousness” (Heb 5:13). In the meantime, laboring in prayer is in order.

Paul does not suggest that they inquire of the Laodicean brethren if they would like to read what Paul wrote to the Colossians. Rather, they were to see to it that the letter was read to those brethren.

the church of the Laodiceans . . .” Other versions read, “see that it is read also,”^{NKJV} “have it also read,”^{NASB} and “let the same be done.”^{BEBE}

Paul does not suggest that they inquire of the Laodicean brethren if they would like to read what Paul wrote to the Colossians. Rather, they were to see to it that the letter was read to those brethren.

There are several things that are assumed in this admonition.

- ✚ That there was some association of the brethren in Colossae and the brethren in Laodicea.

spiritual growth and stability (Eph 4:15). Since the church is, in fact, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), that is to be its specialty. That is why the Laodiceans would profit from hearing the Epistle to the Colossians.

READ THE OTHER EPISTLE

“ . . . and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”

The wording of this verse has produced all manner of interpretations, most of which lack the power to edify. Note that the Apostle does not say “read the epistle TO Laodicea,” but “read the epistle FROM Laodicea.” This has led

ARCHIPPUS

“¹⁷ And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.”

Here Paul goes further than a mere salutation or greeting. He has a personal word that is to be delivered to Archippus. Paul refers to him as “our

fellowsoldier” in his letter to Philemon. Some suppose that he was Philemon’s son, while Apphia was Philemon’s wife (Phile 1:2). At any rate, the reference to

Archippus in the book of Philemon is the only other reference to him. It is obvious in both references that he was involved in the work of the Lord.

TAKE HEED

“And say to Archippus, Take heed . . .” Other versions read, “See to it that you,”^{NIV} “See that you,”^{RSV} and “be sure to carry out.”^{NLT}

This is the way heaven speaks to stewards – those who have been given something to do. The words “take heed” come from a single Greek word – βλέπε (ble-pee). It means “to see, discern, have the power of seeing, understand, discover, to contemplate, and to look into.”^{THAYER} “To become aware of, to notice.”^{LOUW-NIDA} In this text it means **to find out, discover, and be conscious of.**

Archippus is being challenged to consider something, to have an understanding of it, and perceive it and devote himself to it. He is not to be ignorant in this area, or address it in a slovenly manner. Others uses of this word confirms this is the meaning.

✦ “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man **take heed** how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Cor 3:10).

✦ “But **take heed** lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak” (1 Cor 8:9).

✦ “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth **take heed** lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

✦ “But if ye bite and devour one another, **take heed** that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal 5:15).

This has to do with understanding and perception, key elements in the life of faith. The Greek word from which “take heed” is taken is translated in a number of different ways. All of them accent this matter of perception. Here are some of the translations of that word. “I see another law” (Rom 7:23), “ye see your

calling” (1 Cor 1:26), “Behold Israel after the flesh,” 1 Cor 10:18), “beware of dogs” (Phil 3:2), “**beholding your order,**” Col 2:5).

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of light, and those within it are “children of light” (Eph 5:8). **They have come into a realm of understanding,** and have received an anointing by which they “know all things,” having access to “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are “hid in Christ” (1 John 2:20-27, Col 2:3). Here, then, is something that Archippus is to understand, and to which

Archippus is being challenged to consider something, to have an understanding of it, and perceive it and devote himself to it. He is not to be ignorant in this area, or address it in a slovenly manner.

he is to devote himself.

TO THE MINISTRY

“ . . . to the ministry which thou hast received . . .” Other versions read, “the work you have received,”^{NIV} “the task that you received,”^{NRSV} and “the ministrations that thou didst receive.”^{YLT}

Jesus spoke of His kingdom in this manner. “For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, **and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch**” (Mark 13:34-37). The expression “to every man his work” equates with the “ministry” to which Archippus was to take heed.

“Ministry” is an area of kingdom responsibility. It has to do with carrying out the will of the Lord in a specific area.

Archippus is being challenged to comprehend what he has been given to do

– to look into it, perceive it, and throw himself into it.

RECEIVED IN THE LORD

“ . . . in the Lord.” Other versions read, “the Lord has given you to do,”^{BBE} and “the Lord assigned to you.”^{NJB}

“The ministry” is, in fact, the work that Jesus had given Archippus to do. It had to do with where the Lord had placed him in the body (1 Cor 12:18). **In Christ Jesus members of the body are given assignments by the Head of the body.** This is the meaning of First Corinthians 12:5-6: “And there are

differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Cor 12:6).

FULFILL IT

“ . . . that thou fulfil it.” Other versions read, “complete the work,”^{NIV} “do the work,”^{BBE} and “carry out.”^{NLT}

Archippus is not only admonished to see and comprehend what Jesus had given him to do. He was to “fulfill,” or “complete” it. We are not told why Paul delivered this word to Archippus. Perhaps he had grown weary, or was being distracted to other things. Whatever the reason, the word from heaven was to “fulfill” the work he had been given to do.

When Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, exited from the arena of warfare, He cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). A few hours before that, He fervently prayed to the Father in the behalf of His disciples. In that prayer He confessed, “I have FINISHED the work Thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). **In this, he set the tone for all who labor in the vineyard of the Lord. They are to complete what they have been given to do.**

When Paul readied himself to be offered up to God in a final sacrifice of love, he said, *"I have finished my course"* (2 Tim 4:7).

That is the norm for all who work

for the Lord. **Finish the work he has given you to do!** God is not glorified by abandoned labors! Rest assured, every steward will be called to account for his stewardship, and every laborer for his labor. Jesus will honor those who do His

will heartily and thoroughly before the Father, the holy angels, and the assembled universe. Until then, let every believer see to it that they perceive their ministry, consider it in faith, and then put their might into fulfilling it.

THE FINAL SALUTATION

"¹⁸ The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen."

The Epistle was probably written by Tychicus, Paul's amanuensis, or

he wrote to the Thessalonians, *"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand"* (2 Thess 2:2). Others had said that Paul was saying *"Let*

was being brought to the Colossians at a great personal cost on the part of Paul. He had written while in chains, and asked them to remember that fact. The Spirit speaks to us on such matters: *"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body"* (Heb 13:3).

GRACE BE WITH YOU

"Grace be with you." This was frequently the final word of Paul to his readers (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15; Heb 13:25). For that matter, the very last words of the Bible are, *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."* (Rev 22:21).

A fitting conclusion, indeed. We *"believed through grace"* (Acts 18:27). Justification is *"of faith, that it might be by grace"* (Rom 4:16). The gift of righteousness is *"by grace"* (Rom 5:15). It is *"by grace"* that we are *"saved"* (Eph 2:5,8). God has given us *"everlasting consolation and good hope through grace"* (2 Thess 2:16). If grace is with us, so is everything that brings. Praise the Lord!

AMEN

"Amen." Later versions omit this word. ^{NASB/NIV/NRSV} However, the word is an appropriate one. It means "so be it," affirming that what has been said is fully trustworthy.

During the reading of the curses of the Law, the people were required to say *"Amen,"* after the reading of each one (Deut 27:15-26). The Psalms frequently contain the expression, *"Amen and Amen"* (Psa 41:13; 72:19; 89:52). Paul spoke of the assembly of the righteous saying *"Amen at the giving of thanks"* (1

See with what care the Apostle guards what he says, ensuring the brethren that this has really come from him. The very fact that he did this shows the faithfulness and integrity of the Apostle.

stenographer, as the Apostle dictated to him. But now Paul takes the quill from the writer and personally writes on the manuscript.

BY THE HAND OF ME

"¹⁸ The salutation by the hand of me Paul." Other versions read, *"I, Paul, write this greeting."* ^{NASB/NIV}

This was a special token of the authenticity of this Epistle, as was his custom. Thus he wrote to the Thessalonians, *"The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write"* (2 Thess 3:17). His personal signature was to his letters what the king's signet was to his proclamations. Thus other versions read, *"which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters."*

You may recall that erroneous letters had gone out to several brethren, representing themselves as being from Paul. Some appear to have sent out false teachings concerning the coming of the Lord, putting Paul's name on them. Thus

us do evil, that good may come" (Rom 3:8). However, when the distinguishing teaching of the Apostle was joined to his personal signature, it served to assure the brethren.

See with what care the Apostle guards what he says, ensuring the brethren that this has really come from him. The very fact that he did this shows the faithfulness and integrity of the Apostle.

REMEMBER BY BONDS

"Remember my bonds." Other versions read, *"Remember my chains,"* ^{NKJV} *"Remember my imprisonment,"* ^{NASB} *"Remember my fetters."* ^{RSV} In another Epistle he added, *"but the Word of God is not bound"* (2 Tim 2:9).

Earlier Paul had told the Colossians that he was suffering on their account: *"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church"* (Col 1:24). That is, the truth

Cor 14:16). There are frequent Apostolic affirmations that are followed by an "Amen" (Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; 2

Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; ; 5:11; 2 Pet 3:18; Jude 1:25).

"Amen" is the language of

acquiescence. There is agreement in it, together with a note of satisfaction and finality. It reflects spiritual accord. An appropriate ending, indeed!

CONCLUSION

Thus we come to the end of this most excellent Epistle. It has been filled with Kingdom, perspectives that have lifted our souls, challenged our hearts, and

stabilized our spirits. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all

them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). May you experience the power and benefit of the truth that has been declared in this wonderful letter.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 4/14/2004. In this session, we will begin a new series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The first lesson will cover verses one and two of the first chapter: **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK**. We will consider the church at Corinth, the occasion of writing, and other factors that will assist us in profiting from this Epistle. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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OUR NEXT MEETING WILL BEGIN A STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

Remember, the Refreshing Waters Renewal will be held August 3-4, 2004 at the Diamond Grove Christian Church. Details can be obtained on our website:

<http://wotruth.com/renewal.htm>