

Wrestling in Prayer

Colossians 4:12-14

Colossians 4:12-14 - *“Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.*

¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”

Background Notes

Here we have three more of Paul’s fellow workers – Epaphras, Luke and Demas.

a. Epaphras

“Epaphras” is not the same person as “Epaphroditus,” who is mentioned in the book of Philippians. Epaphras was from Colossae. Epaphras was mentioned in Colossians 1:7: *“As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.”* Epaphras brought Paul the news of how the church at Colossae was doing, and he told Paul about the dangerous false teaching in the Colossae area.

In Philemon 23, Epaphras is mentioned as a fellow prisoner with Paul. Like Aristarchus, Epaphras may have volunteered to be a prisoner with Paul in order to help the apostle. I wouldn’t be surprised if he and Aristarchus were both secretaries for Paul, and perhaps they rotated at writing down Paul’s dictation.

As far as we know, Epaphras was not a great teacher or preacher - but he was a great “pray-er”! Notice that he *always labored in prayer* for the Colossians! He prayed fervently that the Colossians would become mature and complete in all the will of God.

How did Paul know that Epaphras was a fervent “pray-er”? Paul likely heard him pray in the prison situation. Can you imagine the Roman guards, as they rotated on their shifts, hearing the missionary team’s prayer meetings? I’m sure Epaphras prayed fervently for the guards as well! In Philippians 1:12-13 Paul mentioned that the whole palace guard had come under the sound of the gospel, and most likely some of them believed.

b. Luke

What do we know about Luke? We know he was a physician – a beloved physician! We know he was a Gentile, because Justus, Aristarchus and Mark were Paul’s only fellow-workers who were Jewish (v11). Luke joined Paul on the second

missionary journey. We know that because Luke wrote the book of Acts, and in Acts 16:10 the use of the word “we” begins. Up to this point in the book, Luke used the words “he” or “they.”

So Luke joined Paul on the second missionary journey, probably as his personal physician. He was with Paul when Paul was in prison at Caesarea, and he was with Paul on the ship voyage to Rome (Acts 27). He was with Paul right to the end. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul’s final epistle, he said that Luke is with him. Paul wrote 2 Timothy from a dungeon in Rome, and soon after he was beheaded for the sake of Christ.

Luke is a great example of a faithful and productive Christian. Did you know that, volume-wise, Dr. Luke wrote most of the New Testament? If Paul did not write Hebrews, Luke wrote most of the volume of the New Testament. He wrote two long books: the Gospel of Luke and the books of Acts.

Luke had a change of career. He went from being a local doctor to being a missionary, although he still used his physician’s skills. Maybe some of you can identify with Luke. I can identify with him, because I had a career change. My educational background is in engineering, and I worked as a research scientist until the Lord called me into full-time ministry. I’m very thankful for my background in science, and I continue to use it! Maybe God will ask some of you to change careers - sometimes God works that way.

c. Demas

No commendation is given for Demas (v14). Maybe that’s a foreshadowing or a hint of Demas’ future desertion. In 2 Timothy 4:10-11 Paul said, *“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica.”* Apparently Demas was not a heretic, but he deserted the apostle Paul when the going got tough. Demas is certainly not a model for us to follow. He was faithful for a while, but he deserted the apostle’s team because he *“loved this present world.”*

Doctrinal Point

Wrestling in prayer brings results.

“Laboring fervently” is translated from the same Greek word from which we get the word “agonize.” This word was used at the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. This word could be used for “struggle” or “striving” in the athletic arena, as in the sport of wrestling – in fact, the word could even be translated “wrestling.” Epaphras “wrestled in prayer” for the church at Colossae - and there were good results! The Colossian believers did not fall prey to the false teaching, and they continued to grow spiritually.

Notice that Epaphras was a **“people pray-er.”** He wasn’t a “building pray-er,” or a “program pray-er.” He didn’t pray for the Colossians to get a new church building or a have a successful music program. He was a **people pray-er**, but he

didn't pray for their material wealth, or even their physical health. He prayed for their **spiritual growth**, that they would *"stand mature and complete in all the will of God."* It's not wrong to pray for church buildings and for church programs and for our material needs, but praying for spiritual growth and health is a top priority. What a great model to follow!

James 5:16-17 says that the *"effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,"* and then the example of Elijah is given: *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit."*

Why did Elijah pray fervently about the rain stopping, and then the rain returning again? He prayed because he was concerned about the spiritual condition of the people of Israel. God's Law said that if His people followed Him, He would send rain, but if they forsook the Lord, He would stop the rain. (See Deuteronomy 11 & 28.) Elijah prayed fervently on the basis of God's Word - he "wrestled in prayer." He was concerned about the spiritual condition of the people. He prayed earnestly - and there were results!

Practical Application

Let's be "people pray-ers," like Epaphras.

When was the last time you wrestled in prayer, maybe even to the point of tears, for the spiritual growth of a fellow believer? We pray about so many things - about our church finances, or about new programs, and even about the weather for our church picnics! But if we're "people pray-ers," we'll pray for *people!* People pray-ers don't just pray for the physical health or job situation of other believers - they pray for their spiritual growth.

Let's be practical here. Why don't we take this like a school assignment, and begin praying earnestly this very week for a particular brother or sister who needs to grow spiritually. Pray, like Epaphras, that they would *"stand perfect and complete in the will of God."* That kind of prayer brings results, because the Lord loves to answer that kind of prayer! And what an encouragement and blessing to us when we see that our fervent prayers answered!

Let's be people pray-ers, like Epaphras. Let's pray for spiritual growth for one another.