

PREFACE

It has been a rewarding journey, for the last nine months, through Paul's letter to the Colossians. We have learned much about Paul, about Epaphras, about Tychicus, about the Colossians themselves. But far more than that we have learned much about Jesus Christ.

As A. T. Robertson writes, Colossians truly is a "full-length portrait of Christ." In this letter the apostle Paul declares in no uncertain terms the supremacy of Christ Jesus. Just as some people carry around with them a copy of the US Constitution for those times when they need reassurance of our laws, I commend to you this letter to the Colossians for those times when the philosophies of this world begin to sound convincing, when faith begins to lose its firm footing. Just open this book and refresh your faith with the preeminence, the majesty and power, the *sufficiency* of Christ.

In our final passage, Paul mentions more of his fellow laborers, offers final greetings and commands, before saying good-bye in his own hand.

Read Colossians 4:12-13.**w12-13**

Paul first mentions Epaphras—currently with him in Rome, but essentially the "pastor" of the Colossian church—the one who had brought the gospel to them, and who carried the burden of their spiritual well-being. It was Epaphras who journeyed to Rome to inform Paul about what was going on in his church—e.g., the false, heretical teachers pulling some away from faith in Christ alone—and to seek his counsel.

Paul goes out of his way to express to the church how hard, how fervently Epaphras was laboring for them. He does this with his choice of two words.

always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers,

laboring earnestly^{nasb}, **laboring fervently**^{kjvs}, **struggling**^{esv}, **wrestling**^{niv} = *agonizomai* = from <G73> (agon); **to struggle**, literally (to compete for a prize), figuratively (to contend with an adversary), or genitive (to endeavor to accomplish something) :- fight, labor fervently, strive; **to contend for a prize**; ["...**strenuous and consistent intervention** with the Lord on behalf of the Colossians—prayer needed especially in light of the danger posed by the false teachers." (Douglas Moo; emphasis added)]

In v12 Paul describes Epaphras in much the same way he described himself in v1:28-29.

Read Colossians 1:28-29.

striving = *agonizomai*

And both men are striving, are laboring fervently for the same thing.

Epaphras...is...always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

The various translations shift the words around, and change the meaning slightly, but essentially say the same thing: the prayers of both Paul and Epaphras are that the Colossians would stand firm, mature, perfect (i.e., complete), fully assured of their faith in the will of God in Christ.

The second word Paul uses to describe Epaphras' labors is found in v13.

Read v13.

Paul emphasizes again that he backs up his brother—"I testify for him" (the NIV "vouch for" is a little weak)—and assures his church back home that

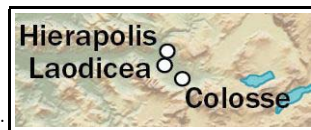
he has a deep concern for you

**a deep concern^{nasb}, great zeal^{kjvs}, working(ing) hard^{niv,esv} = *echei polyn ponon*
= from the base of <G3993> (penes); **toil**, i.e. (by implication)
anguish :- pain. [["work that involves much exertion or trouble"](#)]**

Here is the picture of a true pastor, a true shepherd agonizing over the condition of his flock, on his knees day and night on their behalf. In this description one is reminded of the image of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Read Luke 22:44.

Finally in v13, Paul adds that Epaphras' concern did not stop with Colossae, but extended to those in Laodicea and Hierapolis, two cities nearby.



v14

Two more of Paul's companions are mentioned in v14.

Read Colossians 4:14.

This is the first mention of Luke by name in the NT, and the only reference to him being "the beloved physician." From it we also deduce that he was a Gentile. In vv10-11 Paul mentions three individuals, stating that they were the only Jewish "fellow workers" with him. If we assume that he considered Luke a fellow worker—a logical conclusion since we know Luke traveled extensively with Paul, and was with him at the end—then he was not Jewish, but Gentile.

Demas (day-mas') is another story, however. We know nothing about him personally—except for the telling passage in 2 Timothy.

Read 2 Timothy 4:9-10.

For some the gravitational pull of this world overwhelms. For some—even some believers—the enticements of this present age are stronger than the promises of the next. The story of Demas, once a companion of the apostle Paul, should stand as a warning for all of us. [[Back to Colossians](#)]

Read Colossians 4:15-16.

In many respects the early church was ignorant of much that we know today. The faith was young; many of the documents that we depend on for understanding the Christian faith were just being written, and were as yet unknown to the church at large. And many, if not most of the believers could not read anyway; documents had to be read to them.

So today we have a great advantage. The Christian faith is more developed, mature; a completed canon is readily available in not just multiple languages, but multiple versions; and most believers can read the Bible for themselves. But perhaps there is one thing the early church had that is, if not lacking, at least diminished today: enthusiasm, excitement, eagerness.

Just imagine, you are a believer in Colossae, and one day old friends Tychicus and Onesimus arrive carrying a letter from the apostle Paul. You sit in rapt wonderment as the letter is read (and surely re-read). Of late you have been hearing all sorts of teaching that has caused you to question some of what you thought you knew and believed. Some of it seems to make sense to you, and you have been left confused: Which is correct?

But then you hear the counsel of Paul. His convicting and reassuring words make you feel like someone who has just stepped from quicksand onto solid rock. Your faith has regained its footing. Then, near the end of his letter, you hear that Paul also wrote a letter to the believers in Laodicea, and soon you will be hearing it as well. What joy fills your heart, anticipating that good news!

When was the last time your heart beat faster over the sweet anticipation of hearing a new (to you) or deeper message from the Lord? When was the last time hearing that good news ignited in you a youthful excitement, or a deep, profound joy?

Most of us have lived with the Lord and His word so long that we have lost the wonderment of it all. Let us call upon the Holy Spirit to reawaken in us some of that "new-Christian" enthusiasm we have lost.

Nympha and the church that is in her house

Verse 15 includes the line "Greet...Nympha [or Nymphas] and the church that is in her [or his] house."

The KJVs use the masculine form of the name (*Nymphas*), with the associate masculine pronoun "his." I won't trouble you with all the detailed whys and wherefores behind this, but let it suffice that most modern translations and commentators agree that the feminine (*Nympha*) is correct.

Read v17.

(ar'-khip-os: "horse-ruler")

Scholars have wasted many good hours theorizing about who Archippus was, where he lived, what his role was in the church—and was Paul, here affirming or scolding him. Some scholars need to get a life. The plain truth is that Scripture does not tell us; we don't know the answers to those questions.

Archippus is mentioned in just one other place: Philemon.

Read Philemon 1-2.

The context seems to suggest that either Archippus was a member of their household, or important in the church that met in their house. That's all we can guess at. [[Back to Colossians](#)]

"Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

blepo = see what is in front of you

"Take heed" = keep an eye on, pay attention to

Whatever his "ministry"—the word is *diakonia*: work, service—it was important, enough that Paul publicly called upon the church itself to remind Archippus of this.

fulfill = *pleroo* = from <G4134> (pleres); to make replete, i.e. (literal) to cram (a net), level up (a hollow), or (figurative) to furnish (or imbue, diffuse, influence), satisfy, execute (an office), finish (a period or task), verify (or coincide with a prediction), etc. :- accomplish, × after, (be) complete, end, expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, make) full (come), fully preach, perfect, supply.

Paul has been using this word throughout his letter to the Colossians, and here he uses it to encourage Archippus *to complete, to accomplish* the task his Master (*kyrios*) has assigned him.

I can't think of a better last command with which Paul could have closed this letter. The Lord has assigned every one of His children some good work to accomplish in His name in His kingdom. No matter what it is, from the small and secret to the large and public, we are to see it through to the end. We are to pay attention to it, and complete it, for the work order has come straight from the top.

v18

Paul opened this letter expressing grace to the Colossians, and he closes it (as in all his letters) doing the same. But first he has one last request of them.

Read v18.

The apostle dictated most of his letters, but he typically "signed" each letter in his own hand. This authenticated the letter (even more important, considering his apostolic office), and added a personal closing. As Paul takes the stylus in his own hand he includes a prayer request: "Remember my bonds."

chains, bonds, imprisonment = *desmos* = from <G1210> (deo); a band, i.e. ligament (of the body) or **shackle** (of a prisoner); figurative **an impediment** or disability :- band, bond, chain, string.

Matthew Henry: He does not say, "Remember I am a prisoner, and send me supply;" but, "Remember I am in bonds as the apostle of the Gentiles, and let this confirm your faith in the gospel of Christ." It adds weight to his exhortation [in Ephesians 4:1]: "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

Next Class: "Prophet, Priest & King: Christ in the Old Testament"