

# Lesser Known Characters 03 Epaphras-Man of Prayer

by Joseph Balsan

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*The sermon highlights Epaphras as a model of prayer, service, and sainthood within the Christian community.*

**Duration:** 53:52

**Scripture:** Ruth 2:4, Psalm 119:11, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:2-3, Colossians 3:23, Colossians 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:28

**Topics:** "Power Of Prayer", "Faith And Service"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of standing in one's place and being committed to prayer. He uses the story of Gideon and his army to illustrate this point. Gideon's men stood in their places, holding their trumpets, torches, and broken pitchers, and when they followed Gideon's signal, the enemy was routed. The speaker also shares the example of George Miller, a man of great faith who relied on prayer to provide for the needs of thousands of people. He concludes by highlighting the significance of prayer as a vital and powerful act of service to God.

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## Transcript

And verse 3, Colossians chapter 1 and verse 3, We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which he hath to all the saints. For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, where have ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you as it is in all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth. As ye also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ, who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Colossians chapter 4, Colossians chapter 4 and verse 12, Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you. Always laboring fervently for you in prayer, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I dare him record that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

And one more portion in Philemon, which is just before the book of Hebrews, Philemon, one chapter there. And notice the twenty-third verse. Philemon, verse 23.

There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow labors, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. May the Lord bless to us the reading of his word.

As far as I know, these are the only three portions concerning this man whose name is, or was, Epaphras. Now, it has been said that Epaphras is a contraction of Epaphroditus, but that doesn't mean, of course, that he is the same character, because Epaphras is a believer who was associated with the church at Colossae, while Epaphroditus, we know, was the one who was associated with the church at Philippi. And, of course, we have him brought before us a very important ministry that he fulfilled when, at the expense, or you might say in danger of his own life, when he brought to Paul in prison the gift of the Philippian believers jeopardizing his life in doing so.

They had no mail service in those days, and so we find that that was the service that he rendered nearly at the cost of his life. But Paul says, God had mercy upon him, and upon Paul also, who would have had sorrow upon sorrow had Epaphroditus been taken from them. And so, this Epaphras is not the same character that we have in the Epistle to the Philippians.

And in these three portions that we have read here tonight, we have three things concerning this man brought before us that I would like to bring before you, and that is, we want to think of this man in three ways. First of all, we want to think of him as the saint of Epaphroditus. Notice it says here, as you learned also in the seventh verse, Colossians 1, as you also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ, who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

You notice that Paul is writing to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which were at Colossae. He was a saint. You know, that's quite different from what I was taught when I was a lad.

In the system with which I was associated, a person didn't become a saint until he had done a certain number of works, and after he had been dead for a long time, perhaps after his life had been examined and his works had been examined, if his works were passed over by a certain council, why, then perhaps he might be canonized as a saint. As far as I know, in the teaching of that system, there is still not one United States citizen who is canonized as a saint. Perhaps there is one.

They were talking of one. But, you know, the word of God is quite different, isn't it? When the word of God speaks of believers, it speaks of them as saints, and every believer in Christ is a saint in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are saints not because we act like saints.

Unfortunately, sometimes we act like anything but saints, but we are saints because we are sanctified ones. We are ones who have been set apart by the Lord from the world, and we have been set apart for himself, and we belong to him. Every child of God, the very youngest believer in Christ, is a saint.

And if you are sitting in this meeting tonight, and you haven't been saved more than 24 hours, in God's sight, you are just as much a saint as the one who has been on his way 50 or 60 or 70 years, because a believer's sainthood does not depend upon himself, but it depends upon what he is in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you know, Epiphras has a very unique name. Epiphras's name, what do you suppose Epiphras's name means? Well, Epiphras's name means the lovely one.

Isn't that an unusual name, the lovely one? Is this true of a saint, that he is a lovely one? Is this true of every child of God, that he is a lovely one? Sometimes, perhaps, we may look at one another and

consider one another anything but lovely. But you know, when God looks down upon his saints, the very feeblest of his saints, God sees that one as a lovely one, and make no mistake about it. How do I know that? Well, you know, shortly after I was saved, the Lord graciously saved me by revealing to me the wonderful content of that verse in Acts 16 and 31, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

And when I believed on him, I entered into the joy of salvation, and everything was so nice for a little while, and then all of a sudden I became depressed, and I was cast into doubts, and I began to wonder, well, what about myself? I know that I believe, and I believe that I'm saved, but really and truly, why these doubts? Why this distress? Why this disturbance? You know why? Because I had discovered that within myself there was a thing called sin, a thing that I thought had perhaps been eradicated when the Lord had saved me, but which I found was very much alive, and which was very active and energetic within myself, and I was cast down into the doldrums. Yes, I believed I was saved, all right, but I didn't know how I really stood before the Lord. How did I really stand before him? And one day I was reading that wonderful epistle to the Ephesians, and I read those wonderful words in the first chapter in the sixth verse where it speaks concerning those who I have believed.

It says, Accepted in the Beloved. And I just stopped at those words. Accepted in the Beloved.

Why, what does that mean? Does that mean that I, with all of my weakness, with all of my failure, with all of my inconsistency, does that mean that I am accepted? Does that mean that I am accepted before God in his Beloved Son? And the precious truth came into my soul that is expressed in that hymn, The love wherewith he loves his Son, such is the love he has to me. You know we sometimes sing that song, don't we? So near, so very near to God, near I cannot be, for in the person of his Son I am as near as he. But then the next verse is so much more wonderful.

So dear, so very dear to God, dear I cannot be. The love wherewith he loves his Son, such is his love to me. And I saw accepted in the Beloved means that the love wherewith he loves his Son, such is his love to me.

The loveliness that he sees in his Son is the loveliness that he has bestowed upon the believer that has trusted in Christ. My friend, that's true of you tonight. Yes, you're lovely.

You're lovely. In his sight, you're lovely. You're an epiphant, because as he looks upon you, as he looks upon me, who have believed in his Son, my friends, he sees us accepted in the Beloved.

Isn't that wonderful? Why, if I'm accepted in the Beloved, how could I ever be lost? If I'm accepted in the Beloved, how can a doubt ever come into my heart? If I'm accepted in the Beloved, how can I lack assurance and joy and peace but to know that I'm accepted in him? And I want you to notice that that is the way that this man Epiphras looked at the believers. Here in Colossae, there were things that needed to be straightened out, as we're going to see. But I want you to notice here, in the seventh verse of this first chapter, he says, As he also learned of Epiphras, our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ, who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

When he came to Paul and he was speaking about these Colossians, what did he say to Paul? He said to Paul, he spoke to Paul about the love that these believers had in the Spirit, one for another. In other words, he didn't hesitate. He didn't allow the difficulties to obscure the good that he saw in the people of God.

You know, I was in a certain place one time, and sad to say there was a division amongst the believers. And you know, the preacher is in a rather difficult position in those situations, because, you know, both sides are trying to get a hold of you, and trying to get you over to their side. It happened that several of the brethren were against this one brother, and I'd had the greatest confidence in this brother.

And when I listened to this story, they took me out to lunch, and they start pouring into my ears the fault of this brother. Well, what is the fault of this brother? Well, the fault of this brother is that he lies. And you know, this brother said to me, I hate lies.

I hate a liar. Well, I says, I hate it too. But why do you say that he lies? Well, you know, he says that we had only two Sunday school teachers' meetings in the year, and we had three.

He's a liar. Well, I said, you know, after all, he's a businessman, and he travels quite a bit. He might have been on a trip while you had this business meeting, so he may have been on it too.

Well, he still, I think he's a liar, and I just can't stand a liar. And he went on like that for a while, and then I said to him, well, let me ask you, does he have any good qualities? Oh, yes, he has all kinds of good qualities. Well, what are some of his good qualities? Oh, he's very faithful.

He's very hospitable. He's very generous, and so on and so forth. And he gave me a list of various qualities that were good, and I said to this brother, after I listened to all of these qualities that were so good, I said to him, well, brother, I said, couldn't you look at these good qualities and forget this thing that you think is true but may not be true after all? Why don't you look at the good in your brother? Ah, my brother and my sister, what do you and I look at in our brother? Do we see our brother as God sees him? Do you and I see our sister as Christ sees her? Do you and I look at that one through the eyes of our Lord Jesus and see that one as he or she is in our Lord Jesus Christ? That's real saintly conduct and character.

Yes, Epiphra. Epiphra was a saint, and what a saint he was, because he was not only a saint in Christ, but he acted as becometh a saint. But then I want you to notice something else, and that is to look at him as the servant.

Epiphra was not only a saint, but Epiphra was also a servant. Now, I believe, of course, that the epistle to the Colossians brings before us that this church was evidently founded not by Paul, but it is believed that it was founded by this man Epiphra. He was a man who was ardent in the gospel.

In fact, it is believed that he founded not only this church, but also perhaps a few other churches, but we're not going to go into that. But he was a man who was ardent in the gospel. The Colossians had been brought to a saving knowledge of the gospel through the ministry of this man, through the evangelistic preaching and teaching of this man.

But he was not only ardent in the gospel, but he was one who attended and shepherded the saints of God, because it says here in the first chapter, in the seventh verse, as he also learned of Epiphra, our dear fellow servant who is for you a faithful minister of Christ. In other words, he wanted to see those believers not only saved, but he wanted to see them going on for the Lord. And a difficulty had arisen in the church at Colossae, and so he had gone to the apostle Paul who was in prison, and he communicated to him the burden of his heart and the trouble that was arising in the church at Colossae, and the result was that Paul wrote this epistle setting before the believers at Colossae the things that would set them right and set them straight in their faith concerning the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he was not only ardent in the gospel, he not only attended the saints, but the third thing that's the thing that I want to emphasize to you this evening is, he was a man who agonized in prayer, because it tells us here in Colossians chapter four, it says, Epiphra, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, salutes you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers. If I was to ask you tonight, what is the hardest thing for you as a Christian to do, I wonder what would be your answer. You know what I find to be one of the hardest things as a Christian for me to do? One of the hardest things for me as a Christian to do is to spend time in real, fervent, agonizing prayer.

My, it's so much easier to keep oneself busy, to keep oneself occupied. I don't know how many of you ever read the story of Hudson Taylor, but there are two wonderful books about his life that are very worth reading. If you want a real spiritual blessing, why read the two books written by his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor.

The first book is about his personal experience and exercise before the Lord, and the second is about the work associated with the China Inman Mission, and what a tremendous experience it was. But he says, one of the hardest things I find is to get down on my knees and pray. He says, why, he says, it's amazing.

When I get down on my knees and pray, he says, why, he says, even a window shade that's a little crooked disturbs me, and I get up and I want to straighten it out before I pray. The smallest thing stood in the way to keep him from prayer. And yet, my friends, prayer is one of the most vital things that a Christian can do.

Prayer is real service and real work for God, and I suppose the reason why prayer is so difficult is because it doesn't bring us before men so much. It doesn't, as it were, bring us before the attention of men. It's something that we have to enter into in private with an unseen God and speak to Him, and speak to Him even when we don't feel like praying.

George Miller was a mighty man of prayer. Many of us have read his experiences. How would you like to have 2,000 mouths dependent upon you every day with no visible means of income, and to come there on a morning with 2,000 mouths to feed, and you don't have anything to set before them? And so they get down on their knees and they pray to God, and God answers.

There's a knock on the door, and the man stands at the door and he says, I'm a milkman, my milk wagon just broke down here, and I don't know how we can get it fixed. Can you use some milk? I've got a whole wagon load of milk. Can you use these? He says, I certainly can.

And a few minutes later, a bread man knocks on the door, and he's had some difficulty. He's got a wagon load of bread. Can you please use it? I certainly can.

Yes, answers to prayer. You heard about the time when he was on a ship going from Europe to Canada, and the ship was in a dense fog, and the captain says, we'll never be there on time. He says, I've got to be there on time.

I've got an address that I have to give tomorrow night at 7 o'clock. He says, you'll never be there. He says, we've got to be there.

Let's go down into the cabin and pray. And so they went into the cabin and he prayed, and when he prayed, he said to the captain, well, he says, there's no use of you praying because you don't believe anyway. Let's go upstairs.

And when they got upstairs, the fog was gone, and they made it in time. And yet that very man who could pray in circumstances like that was the very same man who was writing a letter, and the man was waiting to talk to him. And as he was waiting to talk to him, he noticed Mr. Mueller bow his head, and he prayed, and then he continued writing his letter.

And after he finished his letter, his guest said, Mr. Mueller, he says, let me ask you a question. He says, I saw your head bowed in prayer. Were you praying about something? He says, yes, I was.

What were you praying about? He said, I was praying about my pinpoint. I had to write this letter, and this pinpoint was fragile, and I was afraid it wouldn't hold out. It's the only point I got, and I've got to get this letter out, so I asked the Lord to please keep the point so that I could write this letter.

He prayed. He prayed about moving the fog. He prayed about a little pinpoint.

And the God who was interested in moving the fog was the God who took care of the pinpoint as well. Prayer. What do we know about prayer? You know, sometimes I think that some of us brethren in business means we sit up all night, and we discuss the pros and the cons of a situation, and we have prayed nerves.

I think sometimes if we spent a night in prayer about the situation, I believe that we'd see God doing things. I believe God would lead us, and God would do for us. My friend's spending a night in prayer.

Have you ever spent a night in prayer? The Lord Jesus did. He spent a whole night in prayer. Why? Because he had a momentous decision to make the next day.

And what was that decision? He had to choose twelve disciples who would be his apostles. And with that tremendous decision before him, and that choice before him, he spent a whole night in prayer. And he chose everyone, the right one.

And there was no mistake. Every one divinely chosen, our Lord spent a night in prayer. You know, sometimes we feel to ourselves we're limited.

Sometimes, unfortunately, we feel to ourselves our days of service are limited. Our circumstances are limited. There's not very much we can do anymore.

When I was a young Christian, we used to say amongst ourselves, well, if you can't do anything else, you can pray. My friends, let me say, I've changed in years. And I've changed to you can't do anything unless you do pray.

You can't do anything unless you do pray. Epiphra was a man who agonized in prayer. Epiphra, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, salutes of you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers.

Laboring fervently. It means he agonized. It means he wrestled.

He wrestled. In other words, he was grappling. He was grappling with God about these things, grappling against Satan who was seeking to hinder.

And you know, I don't think there's any way Satan tries to hinder us so much as making it difficult to pray. Mr. Mueller said, he says, the less he felt like praying, the more he prayed. And the more he prayed, the more he began to pray.

The less he prayed, the less he felt like praying. And perhaps never, my friends, do we accomplish so much in prayer as when we feel unlike praying. We don't feel like praying because all the powers of Satan are against us, laboring fervently for you in prayers.

And I want you to notice, he was very specific in his requests, and spiritual in his requests. He prayed that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Very few words.

Notice that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, thirteen words in our authorized version that brings before us what this man prayed for. And I want you to notice, my friends, that his prayer was very different from many of the prayers that we offer in public as well as private.

You listen to many prayers, and many prayers are very much occupied with the material, physical situation and circumstances of life. And don't misunderstand me. We should certainly pray for the sick.

We should pray for those who are passing through trial. But I wonder, how much do we pray for the spiritual condition of the saints of God? Might I suggest to you that he had three specific requests? It says here, he prayed that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. The first thing that he prayed for was that they might stand.

Stability. You know, we need stability today. We need to pray that God's people will stand.

You know, we're living in a day today when God's people are falling for anything and everything that comes along. All it needs is a polished speaker with a smooth manner and a gentle character, and people of God are swept away with the smoothness and the cunningness of what the one says. People today are falling for things.

Our brother A.P. Gibbs said one time, If you don't stand for anything, you're going to fall for everything. If you don't stand for anything, you're going to fall for everything. And the Lord wants us to stand.

To stand means to be set in place. And you know, when I think of that, I think of an incident in the Old Testament. Remember that? Remember when the Midianites had the children of Israel under their control, and there was Gideon, and he was grinding and taking care of the little wheat that he was able to take care of? My, it was a great cost that Gideon was able to gather a little wheat, and he marched over it.

And I want to tell you something. It'll take a great cost for you to get a little wheat. It is said of Mr. John R. Caldwell, who was a businessman, as well as the editor of The Witness magazine a number of years ago, and a very much sought-after Bible teacher, who was busy in his mercantile business six days a week.

They said, Mr. Caldwell, how do you get the things that you get? How, where do you find the time in the midst of your busy business life to get things from God the way you're able to get them and put them out for the feeding of God's people? He pulled open his drawer, and he pulled out a Bible, and he says, every day from twelve o'clock to one o'clock, my office door is closed, and while I'm eating my light lunch, he says, I study the Word of God. And he says, I get from God that which I need for my soul and to feed others as well. Nobody violates that one hour that I have set aside for God.

I knew a businessman who is now with the Lord and was an able teacher amongst God's people, a busy active life, and many of you would know him if I was to give him his name. He's now with the Lord. He told me a number of years ago when he came home from his office, nobody was allowed to give him his phone

number because when he came home, he was through with his business.

Now, I realize everybody can't do that, but he did. And he says, I spend time alone with God. It cost Gideon something to keep this portion from the Midianites, but he did it.

And the result was God called him to lead Israel. And you remember how when they were going against the Midianites? Remember, God says, too many. You know, we like numbers, but God said, too many.

Thirty-two thousand, too many, I can't use you. Too many? Yes, send all who are afraid. Send them back.

Twenty-two thousand went. There were ten thousand left. God says, still too many.

Take them to the water. And he says, test them by the water. Those who stooped down to drink, he says, put them on one side.

And those who laughed like dogs, put them on the other side. And 9,700 of them, they got down on their knees. They got down on their hands.

They had to be situated just so before they would drink. Everything had to be just so convenient for them before they would drink. The 300 didn't even get down on their knees.

They just scooped up the water and drank. God said, put those 300 aside. He said, I'll use those.

When it's convenient for me, when it's convenient for us, then we'll have meetings. When it's convenient for me, why, yes, I intend to spend time studying the Word of God someday when it's convenient. But the man who's willing at such expense and inconvenience to get something, that man who has his eyes on the enemy, what I wanted to get at is this.

Those 300 men were given a lamp, and they were given a picture, and they were given a bugle, a trumpet. And it says, Gideon divided them into three groups, and it says, every man stood in his place. They were every man set in his place surrounding the camp of the Midianites.

And when Gideon gave the signal, they blasted with the trumpets, braced the pictures, let their light shine, and the enemy was routed. They were all standing, standing in his place, standing with his trumpet, standing with his torch, standing with the picture broken that you may stand. Epaphras prayed that believers at Colossae might stand.

We need to stand. We need to stand for this book, that this book is the inspired Word of God from cover to cover. That God speaks to us through this book.

We need to stand for the truths of the book, that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is born or was born of a virgin, that Jesus is the Savior for sinners, that Jesus did rise from the dead. We need to stand amidst all the prevailing confusion and departure. We need to stand.

Epaphras prayed that the believers at Colossae might stand, but he prayed that they might stand perfect. And this word here suggests not only stability, but maturity. God wants his people to grow.

God wants his people to mature into men and women for God. One of the saddest things I heard about was a brother in Kansas who labors amongst the assemblies in Kansas as well as other places, and it was his custom to visit out-of-the-way saints. And there was a couple that he visited for some years, and they

were along the elderly side.

He had won their confidence, and one day when he came to their home, they said to him, Brother, we want you to see something that we've never showed anybody. We want to show you our baby. Huh? We want to show you our baby.

And he was flabbergasted. He was dumbfounded. His mind was reeling.

Baby? This couple a baby? Why hadn't I heard a thing about it? What about it? They took him upstairs into a room, and they opened the door, and there in a crib they saw a baby form with a full-grown man's head. A baby that was over 40 years old. A baby which had never grown.

Life? It had life? Yes, it had life, but it hadn't grown. There was a Scottish brother who came from Scotland, and he came into one of the cities in Michigan. He came over to visit, and he met a certain brother in the assembly.

And when this brother shook hands with him, he said, Brother, I am redeemed. Well, this brother said, Thank God, I'm very happy to hear that. And he ministered the word of God there for a week and left.

A year later he came back, and when he shook his brother's hand, the first thing he said to him was, Brother, I am redeemed. He looked at him, and he says, Well, I'm glad to hear that. He was gone for three more years, and he came back the third time.

And when he shook his brother's hand, the first thing he said was, Brother, I am redeemed. And the Scottish brother, with a tart manner, says, Brother, let me ask you, how long have you been redeemed? He says, I've been redeemed for 40 years. Forty years.

And all you can say after 40 years is, I am redeemed. Now, I'm thankful that you're redeemed, but is that all you've learned in 40 years? Haven't you grown? Epiphras pray that they might stand, but that they might stand perfect, that there might be maturity, that there might be growth. My brother and my sister in this book, we have the means of growth.

As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. And they tell us that the real rendering is that ye may grow thereby unto salvation. What does that mean? God has saved you.

Have you developed and matured into it? That little babe that is born has all the potential of manhood or womanhood. But it needs to be fed. It needs to exercise.

It needs to develop. If it's going to mature physically, mentally, emotionally, you and I need to grow. Are you and I feeding on the word? Are we spending time in his presence? Are we exercising? He not only prayed for stability in the saints, he prayed for maturity.

In this first chapter of Colossians, Paul says he desired to present every man perfect, mature, complete in Christ Jesus. That was his aim, that they might mature. My brother and my sister, we mature as you and I get into this book and as you and I carry it out in our everyday life.

But there was a third thing that he prayed for. He prayed that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. He didn't want them one-sided.

He didn't want them half-baked. You know, concerning Ephraim, it says, he was a cake not turned. You know what happens with a cake when it's not turned? It's all burnt on one side.

And sometimes Christians become like that. They're half-baked. In other words, they're one-sided.

Complete in all the will of God. I remember a brother saying to me a number of years ago up in northern Michigan. He was a simple man.

He says, Joe, all I'm interested in is being saved and going to heaven. That's all I want to know. I says, brother, that's a good thing to know, but God certainly wants you to know more than that, because if he didn't, he could have just as well refrained from giving us a big part of the Bible.

Salvation is wonderful, but salvation is the beginning of a life. Complete in all the will of God. Or a person says, well, all I'm interested in is how to live personally for the Lord.

That's wonderful. That's important, to live personally for the Lord, to live in fellowship with the Lord. But I believe that if you're going to live in fellowship with the Lord personally, I believe it's going to lead to other things.

You and I come to this book, and this book tells us how we're to act and to live in our relationships in life, in our marriage relationship. The Bible tells the husband how to act toward his wife, how to love his wife, to care for her, to provide for her. One husband loved his wife so much that he came to Mr. Ironside one time, and he says, brother Ironside, I'm afraid I love my wife too much.

He says, brother, he says, you can't love your wife too much, because you're to love your wife even as Christ loved the church. Do you love her that much? The wife's place in relation to her husband, submissive to her husband, working with her husband, being a support to her husband. The relationship of parents to the children, and children to the parents.

The will of God. The relationship of the businessman or employer to his employee. Not so long ago, I gave a series of messages on Ruth, and you know we have a beautiful picture of labor relations there in the book of Ruth.

The first chapter, you remember, when Boaz comes into his field, why his servants say to him, the Lord, he says to the servants, the Lord bless you. And they in turn say, the Lord be with you. My, it would be wonderful if labor relations were like that, if management and labor worked together like that.

If management said to labor, the Lord bless you, and labor said to management, well, the Lord be with you. My, that would be wonderful. The Bible tells us about business relationships, doesn't it? The Bible tells us how to act in our business relationships.

The Bible tells us about our church life, assembly life. Oh, how many say, well, all I'm interested in is salvation. All I'm interested in is trying to live for the Lord in my personal life.

I'm not interested in church tree. Well, my friends, if that's so, we might just as well have been born before the cross, because before the cross there was no church. Israel was God's people.

They were saved. When we come to the New Testament, we find that this is the dispensation of the church. This is a special mystery.

This is the most wonderful age to ever live in, and God has laid down for us not only how to be saved, but God has also laid down for us in his word how we are to carry out in our relationships with fellow believers, how we are to meet, how we are to carry out his will. The assembly is the house of God where the will of God is to be carried out. Epaphras prayed that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Personal life, family life, business life, church life, in every phase of life, he wanted them to know it all, to be complete in all the will of God. Oh, how we need that. He prayed for stability.

He prayed for maturity. He prayed for symmetry. He wanted believers to be complete in all the will of God.

How specific. But I want you to notice the scope of this prayer, or the sphere of this prayer. He says in the twelfth verse of the fourth chapter, For I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

He prayed for three assemblies. He prayed for those at Colossae, for those in Laodicea, for those in Hierapolis. The believers at Colossae were in danger of being led away, of being led away with false teaching.

They needed to stand. In a day when false teaching is increasing on every hand, we need to stand. He prayed for Laodicea.

And what was Laodicea? You know what the danger of Laodicea was, wasn't it? Materialism. In the epistles of the Laodiceans, Thou art rich and increased with goods. Thou sayest I am need of nothing.

Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Materialism. The danger of materialism is that it blinds us to the spiritual.

And that is what hinders spiritual maturity, growth, growth spiritually. Hierapolis is a city which means, or a name which means, sacred city. Historians tell us that it was a place where there were mineral springs that drew multitudes of people to its healing, and where multitudes of sects and systems flourished.

And so it suggests to us, in sacred city, or city of the sanctuary, that he wanted these people to be complete in all the will of God, that they might know God's will for them. You know, I think if there's anything that is being lost sight of today in Christendom, it's the priesthood of believers. Today, we see in ecclesiastical circles one man functioning for the whole.

One man assuming a place of nearness beyond others. Now, there's no doubt that there's a difference of gifts. But just as all believers are saints, all believers also are priests.

And as priests, we have the privilege of offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by our Lord Jesus Christ. And what a privilege that is for a believer to function as a priest. Epiphraas prayed that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

What a service. Do we look upon prayer as a service? Do we think that when we pray we are serving, we are accomplishing something? We are. More, perhaps, than we'll ever realize.

When we turn to Philemon chapter 23, we have the third thing brought before us. It says that Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter, and this is very brief and I'll close. It tells us here that Paul says concerning Philemon, he says here, or concerning Epiphraas, he says, Epiphraas, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.

I think of Epiphra here as a soldier. Epiphra the saint, Epiphra the servant, and Epiphra the soldier. Paul was in prison.

And they tell us that while he was in prison, there were certain men who voluntarily came and shared his imprisonment, just to be company to the apostle and just to encourage him, and Epiphra was one of them. Paul was in prison, and he voluntarily cast in his lot with Paul to be in prison. And it's recorded for us in God's word.

What is suggested to me in this? Well, we know that Paul was the servant of God. We know that he was the one who was standing for God. We know that he was the one who was standing for the truth of God.

He didn't have a majority with him. And he was suffering for the truth. He was in prison.

And what it shows to me is that Epiphra voluntarily casts in his lot and suffers with Paul for the truth's sake. No, we don't like to suffer, do we? We want to avoid it. My, if somebody looks down upon us because of something we believe, we almost shrivel up within ourselves with shame.

Oh, to think, somebody says to me, I'm narrow-minded. Somebody says to me that he doesn't believe this. Or somebody says to me, this thing is not popular.

You know, we're trying to popularize the truth today. Is the truth popular? Is the truth going to become popular? Was Paul wrong, being cast in prison for what he believed? Paul wasn't wrong. Paul was standing for what the word of God says.

Epiphra casts in his lot. You know, we read in the book of Hebrews of Moses, Moses by providence was brought into the palace of Pharaoh. Mr. Darby says providence brought Moses into Pharaoh's palace.

Faith took him out of it. Providence put him there, but faith took him out. In other words, it tells us here in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ.

The reproach of Christ. You know, it is said, if you've ever heard the story of Mr. Donald Ross, who came to Chicago when there were no assemblies in that big city, and he put up a tent, and there were only a few people who came to those meetings, but a few people got saved, and so they determined to establish an assembly. And so they were going to erect a testimony to the Lord, and so they met four believers on that first Sunday morning to remember the Lord.

And a businessman who seemed to be favorable to the truth, and who was, as it were, drawn to the preaching, came to witness that, and as he saw those four believers there, he said, well, this certainly is outside the camp, and this certainly is suffering reproach for Christ. This certainly is the reproach of Christ, and he didn't cast in his lot then. He was willing to be a patron to the truth, but he wasn't ready to be a partner.

I remember a preacher saying one time, calling up some believers in a certain city, and he says, I'm going to hold some meetings. He says, would you like to come to such and such a place? You know, after all, I'm 99 and 44 100 percent with you. But he didn't cast in his lot with them.

He was a patron, but didn't become a partner because of the cost. Epiphras was a partner. He was a fellow prisoner.

He shared the sufferings and the trials of the apostle because of the truth for which he stood. May you and I be prayer partners, and may you and I be partners in the path of fellowship with those who seek to stand, who seek to grow, who seek to know and practice the whole will of God to the glory of God. May the Lord bless His word to each one.

Shall we pray? Our Father, we desire to thank You tonight for Thy precious word. We thank You for this wonderful example that is brought before us of a man who knew what it was to stand for Thee and to pray for others that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. And, Father, we know how much this is needed in these days when there is a great falling away, when there is a great departure, when there are so many doubts and uncertainties.

We pray that Thou wilt help us like those of old to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and to go on for Him according to His word, sharing His reproach, suffering at all costs to carry out His word till He shall come. We commit ourselves to Thee now and thank Thee for this time in the Savior's precious name. Amen.

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