

Andrew Bonar:

'Always labouring fervently for you in prayers,
that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God'

Col. 4:12.

Epaphras was a citizen of Colosse. Hence his deep interest in the Colossians. The Lord does not ask His people to give up their patriotism when they turn to Him. Epaphras had a particular desire that the Colossians should be blessed, because he was one of them.

From the words in Col. 1:7 it would appear that Epaphras was their minister, one for whom Paul had great love. He calls him his 'dear fellow-servant.' From Philemon we find that he was a prisoner at this time along with Paul in Rome. Paul speaks of him as a 'servant of Christ.' If you know the meaning of the words you know what an honour they imply, and at the same time great responsibility.

Let us dwell on this remarkable feature of Epaphras' character, his prayerfulness. He was a prisoner in Rome. Many of God's saints have done their best work in prison. Epaphras wrote nothing; it is not said that he had any visions in that prison; but his work was prayer, 'labouring fervently.' And notice it is in the plural, 'in prayers,' and 'always.'

1. Epaphras' labours in prayer. - Being a servant of Christ, he was one who was very much with Christ.

He went to Him to get commissions, and then returned to tell Him how he had executed them. He was not like Paul who wrote letters never-to-be-forgotten, but he had another talent, that of prayer, and he turned it to good account. He was just as useful, perhaps, in his own place as Paul. He 'laboured fervently' in prayers. The words are like those used about Christ in Gethsemane : 'being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly.'

He agonised in prayer. His were Gethsemane prayers. He made his prison-cell fragrant with the sweet incense of prayer. Is he not a man to be envied? He is certainly a man to be imitated. He did this 'always.' Every day he was to be found praying for his beloved people at Colosse. He had great faith in prayer. He knew the fulness of Christ's heart as well as the abundance of the treasure laid up in Him, so he was not afraid to ask much. He knew there was great danger of his people standing still, and not growing in grace.

Real prayer, earnest prayer, is hard work.

There are so many interruptions ; so many excuses for not persevering suggest themselves to the mind. A believing man is more ready at work than at prayer. Satan has a special ill-will at praying people. Some one has said that Satan's orders are, 'fight not with small or great, but only with the praying people.' If we are to persevere in prayer, it must be prayer in the Spirit, with the atmosphere of the Spirit all around us. Epaphras would never say his prison was a tiresome place. He would say he had plenty of work to do there. Be like him, labouring for God in prayer. If you can't work, if you can't speak, you can pray. But work hard at it like Epaphras, and you will be an immense benefactor to others.

'Of all thy gifts we ask but one, xxxx
Give us the constant power to pray.
Indulge us, Lord, in this request, xx
Thou canst not then deny the rest.' x

Lengthen your brief prayers. Take more time, and in this way bring down showers upon your own soul, and upon all around you.

2. The main theme of Epaphras' request. - We would have thought it would be for a revival, for the conversion of many souls at Colosse. No, it was for believers he prayed with most intense earnestness, and always, day after day. This was an indirect way of reaching the unsaved, for if believers get more of God's grace, they will go forth to others. It is more difficult to find Epaphrases than to find workers. The coldness and inconsistencies of believers are an immense hindrance to the conversion of souls. On the other hand, if believers are full of the Spirit, full of love to souls, the world sees they have got something that earth cannot give, and when they show by their joy in Christ that they are satisfied, the world would like to get at their secret. There are far more people made to think by seeing the joy of believers, and their satisfaction in Christ, than by any word they speak. Epaphras would ask all this for the Colossians, 'that they might be perfect and complete in all the will of God,' - in all that God wanted them to do, that the seal of the Spirit might be very distinct and legible in them. There was once a great deal of murmuring among the Gentile converts in Jerusalem. God showed them how to remedy the evil, and the murmuring was stopped (Acts 6:1-7); and we read that 'the Word of God increased, the number of the disciples multiplied, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.' That was one result of doing the will of God. After Paul's conversion there was a lull in persecution, and 'walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the churches were multiplied.' Besides this result to the unsaved, it is so glorifying to God when believers are lively and vigorous.

EPAPHRAS

Seek to labour fervently in this work of prayer. I have met with many who have come to tell me they were going to give up part of their work because they had not time for it, but I never remember in the course of my ministry meeting with any one who wanted to give up some part of his work because he was going to take the time for prayer. If any one did do this, the part of work he had left would soon be filled up.

If you are not 'always labouring fervently in prayers' you will be dwarfed Christians.

Would you not, for your own sake, be 'perfect and complete in all the will of God'?