



## Preparing For A New Connection To The Body

Saturday, February 16, 2008

### A Servant...A Prayer Warrior...And a Discipler

The Bible is such an incredible Book! How about that for the understatement of the year?! On one hand, it's like the Energizer Bunny—"it just keeps going and going and going!" On the other hand, it's like an onion. I mean, you get through one layer, only to find that there's a whole other complete layer under that, only to find that there's another layer under that! The more of it you learn, the more you see that you need to learn. The more you study it, the more you see that you need to study it. The more you plumb its depths, the deeper you see that it actually goes. No wonder Paul referred to it in Ephesians 3:8 as the "unsearchable riches"! I love the way he talked about it in Romans 11:33...

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

And just think, we actually have these "riches"! Wow! And, isn't that such a great way to refer to this incredible Book that we are blessed to have in our own language? I love that... RICHES! I mean, think about it! The very Word and words of God! What a privilege! What an entrustment! What a Book! What a God!

"Earth to Mark...earth to Mark!" Okay, I'll come back down, but sometimes the truth of God's Word can just send you out there!

And what got me thinking about all of that today, is this passage in Colossians 4:7-18 that we've been using over the past several days to prepare our hearts for Pastor Harrell's message tomorrow morning on, "A New Connection To The Body." I mean, this passage is usually the part we just skim over when we read the Book of Colossians. This is the part that is usually viewed as not having any real depth, and certainly very little practical application to our lives. And yet, I think we've been finding out that it is actually one of the richest parts of the entire Book, not to mention, one of the most practical! And it is that practical, because this section deals with the lives of real people. People like you and me. People like our other brothers and sisters that we'll be gathering together with tomorrow morning.

And as we've seen, Paul mentions eight people in this passage, all of whom were with him in Rome, and "connected" to him on the same ministry team. Now, yesterday, we looked at three men who were with Paul that were from a Jewish background. The next three men that he refers to are men of a Gentile background. The message to us from the lives of these three guys is so relevant and far-reaching, we'll just cover one of them today, and we'll use the other two in conjunction with our time of REFLECTION and RECALIBRATION next Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

The next “photograph” that Paul shows us of those who were with him in Rome, is a man by the name of Epaphras. He’s an unbelievably cool guy, but I wouldn’t suggest naming your kids after him, because it’s just way too difficult to know what syllable to emphasize when you’re trying to pronounce his name.

I like to refer to Epaphras as “The Man With A Prayerful Passion For Discipleship.” Watch what Paul says about him in verses 12 and 13...

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

Now, as we read the letter to the Colossians and we see his name pop up a few times in the Book, he’s not typically a guy too many people know a whole lot about. As the Colossians read this letter, however, this was a man they knew very well. He was actually their Pastor!

Notice again in verse 11 that Paul says...

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ...”

And when you couple that with how Paul referred to him back in chapter 1 and verse 7, you begin to see the role this guy fulfilled as the Pastor of the church in Colossae. Colossians 1:7-8 says,

<sup>7</sup> As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;  
<sup>8</sup> Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

As we talked about briefly the other day, the way Epaphras ended up in Rome with Paul is quite intriguing. It shakes out like this...

Colossae was about 90 miles from the city of Ephesus. The Bible tells us in Acts 20:31 that Paul was the one who started the church in Ephesus, and had spent three solid years preaching and teaching in that church—in fact, Paul even said of his ministry with them...

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD. (Acts 20:27)

Wow! He covered some major ground in those three years! But, at some point during that time period, Epaphras had come under Paul’s ministry there in Ephesus, and had been won to Christ, and discipled, and had gone back to his hometown and founded the church in Colossae. It may have even been that he was also instrumental in planting the two churches in the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis that you see listed in verse 13...

<sup>13</sup> For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

You say, “Well, if he’s the pastor of the church in Colossae—and a ‘faithful’ one to boot, what is he doing over 1000 miles away from his church, and with Paul in Rome?”

Well, we learn in the first two chapters of the Book of Colossians that false teachers had begun to infiltrate the church in Colossae. They were coming in bringing false doctrine about who Christ is, and bringing in philosophies of men’s wisdom, along with legalism, and mysticism, and asceticism. You see, that’s why Paul says the things he says in Colossians chapter two...

2:4—“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.”

2:8—“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy...”

2:16—“Let no man therefore judge you...”

2:18—“Let no man beguile you...in worshipping of angels...”

2:20-23—“Why...are ye subject to ordinances...and neglecting of the body.”

Paul knows that these were the issues they were dealing with in the church because of what he had learned from Epaphras (1:7-8). Epaphras had seen the danger of these false teachers, and had made the long, treacherous journey to Rome to get counsel and further training from his mentor, Paul. In response, Paul immediately writes this letter, and sends it back to Colossae with Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9).

Now, we don't know all of the details of exactly how it happened, but in Paul's letter to Philemon, a letter written to another man in Colossae (the one who had actually opened his home to host the church in Colossae), and in Paul's letter to him, he refers to Epaphras as “My FELLOWPRISONER in Christ Jesus” (Phm. 23). Check that out—somehow it is that after Epaphras got to Rome, he ended up a prisoner with Paul! That's why in Colossians 4:12, Paul says, “Epaphras...saluteth you”—or “Sends his greeting.” So, at the time of the writing of this letter, Epaphras is still in Rome with Paul.

Now, with that as the backdrop, let's take a couple of minutes to see the things that Paul spotlights in the life of Epaphras that can teach us about what it really looks like to be “connected” in the Body of Christ. Paul lets us know, first of all...

#### 1. EPAPHRAS WAS A SERVANT OF CHRIST.

Paul says in Colossians 4:12...

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ...

Listen, here was a guy who understood that when the Lord Jesus Christ saved him, he had been bought with a price off of the slaveblock of sin (1 Cor. 6:20), and because of that, he was no longer his own! He understood that life was no longer about living for himself, and serving himself (2 Cor. 5:15), he understood that he was now the servant, and bondsman of Jesus Christ, to carry out His will. Epaphras found no greater joy than simply being a servant.

Notice also, that when Paul referred to Epaphras back in chapter 1 and verse 7, he called him “our dear FELLOWSERVANT.” I mean, it's like Paul cannot mention this guy's name without thinking of the word “SERVANT”! Do you know people like that? People that aren't looking to be served—they're just constantly looking to be able to serve somebody else.

I think we all need to slam the brakes on right now, and seriously ask ourselves, “Is that how people think of me? If someone were going to describe me to someone else, what word would they use? Would it be “SERVANT”? If Paul had spent the last three years at Northwest Bible Church, and he wrote a letter and included my name, would he think of me as a “SERVANT” of Jesus Christ, and his “FELLOWSERVANT”?

That was true of Epaphras, but what we must realize, is that all of us have been called by God in the Body of Christ, to be “SERVANTS” (1Cor. 9:19). Secondly, Paul says of Epaphras...

#### 2. “EPAPHRAS LABORS FERVENTLY FOR YOU IN PRAYERS.”

Notice, verse 12 says...

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ saluteth you,  
ALWAYS LABORING FERVENTLY FOR YOU IN PRAYERS.”

Even though Epaphras is over 1000 miles away from his local Body of Christ, he's still "laboring" for them... he's still "connected" to them. And how was he "connected"...how was he "laboring fervently" for them? Paul gives us the answer... it was through PRAYER!

And I want you to notice that though he is over 1000 miles away, what he is doing is of great benefit to those folks in Colossae. And the reason that is true is because of what God teaches us in James 5:16...

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Now, I know that we all know that verse, but I just wonder if we really believe it? I mean, do we really believe that Epaphras can accomplish more for his brothers and sisters in his church on his knees in Rome, than he could by spending time with them face to face in Colossae? I've gotta tell you, that's pretty sobering to me. God, forgive me. I want to be so "connected" to the Body, that I pray like Epaphras did!

And, I also want you to notice that Epaphras wasn't just throwing up a little, "Bless all of the good folks back in the church there in Colossae...and 'be' with 'em...and 'lead, guide, and direct' them..." No. Paul said that he was "LABORING in prayers." And not just "laboring"...but, "laboring FERVENTLY"! And not just here and there... not just an "on-again-off-again" kind of thing... Paul says he was "ALWAYS laboring fervently." I mean, this was a guy that really BELIEVED in prayer! He believed in it so much, he actually did it! He actually prayed! "ALWAYS"!

Now, I know there have been times in all of our lives when it could have been said of us, that we "always were laboring fervently in prayers." But, I want you to notice how Paul put this in terms of Epaphras' prayers... "always laboring fervently FOR YOU in prayers." You know, sad to say, I'm afraid that in so many cases, if we were to track the times when we really got serious about prayer— those times when there was an earnestness to our praying...and an intensity behind our words...and we were actually "laboring fervently in prayer," it most likely would be the times in our lives when "WE" really had a need. When there was something that was really affecting "US"... "OUR" family... "OUR finances"... "OUR health." It was those times when "OUR" back was against the wall.

But what is such a blessing, and a conviction about Epaphras, is his prayers weren't because of some personal burden that he had. They weren't related to anything that would have brought personal benefit to himself. Paul said to the Colossians, "He's praying this way FOR YOU!"

Wow! You talk about a guy who knew what it was to be "CONNECTED" to others in the Body of Christ! Man, what a "connection"! Let's don't forget about this whole aspect of prayer as we talk about having "A New Connection To The Body"!

But, notice one final thing about his tremendous man...

### 3. EPAPHRAS HAD A PASSION TO SEE HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS STAND PERFECT AND COMPLETE IN ALL THE WILL OF GOD.

Paul says in verse 12...

<sup>12</sup> 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.

Listen, that was how Paul said Epaphras was praying for those he was "connected" to in the Body of Christ. And, yeah, I'm sure there were people that Epaphras knew of who were sick, and diseased, or had some other kind of physical problems, or financial needs, back in the church in Colossae, and I'm sure he prayed about that. But, his prayers went deeper than those things. Again, I'm sure they included those things... but as Paul talked about how he heard Epaphras praying, the thing that stuck out as the

overriding passion and theme of his prayers, was his request to see that his brothers and sisters would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

And the interesting thing about that to me, is that Epaphras knew that because these people were saved, that POSITIONALLY, they already were “PERFECT” and “COMPLETE!” I mean, Paul already covered that. Back in chapter 1 and verse 22, Paul had already explained to them that because of the blood that the Lord Jesus Christ shed for them, and that had reconciled them, they would be presented “holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.” POSITIONALLY, they were already made “perfect.” Back in chapter 2 and verse 10, Paul had already taught them that “in Christ,” POSITIONALLY, they were already (present tense) “complete.”

You say, “Well, if that’s true, what is Epaphras doing praying so hard and so passionately that they would be “perfect” and “complete”? And the answer is this: Epaphras understood the realities of our POSITION in Christ. That’s not what he was “always laboring fervently in prayers” about. The burden and passion of Epaphras’ heart wasn’t their POSITION—it was their PRACTICE! Notice that Paul didn’t say in verse 12 that Epaphras was praying they would “BE perfect and complete in all the will of God,” but that they would “STAND perfect and complete in all the will of God.” He was passionately praying that their PRACTICE would actually match their POSITION. That they would actually “BECOME” the Christian they were “MADE” (2 Cor. 5:21) the moment the Lord Jesus Christ saved them!

Now, let’s ask ourselves some hard questions again. First of all, is that the overriding passion in our heart for our OWN SELVES... that we would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?” I mean, is that really what we’re passionately pursuing in terms of God and His Word? Is it the longing of our hearts? Is “standing perfect and complete in all the will of God” more important to us than our job... our house... our hobby? Is it the real spiritual ambition of our hearts?

And I know you already see it coming, but secondly, is that the passion that burns in our hearts for the brothers and sisters God has “connected” us with in our own local Body? To see them “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?” And if so, what are we allowing God to use us to do to help them?

Man, I don’t know about you, but Epaphras lets me know that I most definitely need “A New Connection To The Body.” Let’s all pray that that will be what God gives to each of us as we gather together in His name tomorrow.

Once again, I ask you to pray through the “Prayer Guide For Sundays” to further prepare your heart for tomorrow. I love you guys.