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Epaphras (May 1957)

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Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who Is for you a faithful minister of Christ.

—Colossians 1:7.

The personal names of saints recorded on the pages of the Scriptures shine like the stars of heaven, and like the stars differ in glory. As in nature “one star differeth from another star in glory,” so it is with the saints of the Bible. The moral glory contained in the life of Abraham, “the friend of God,” differs from that of Paul, “the bond slave of Christ.” Again, the glory of Moses or Joshua differs from that of Peter or John. God has been pleased to give us a wealth of reflected light in the characters of these well-known saints. All, in their allotted spheres, shine, some nearer to us, and some farther from us, according to the revelation the Spirit of God has given concerning events during their lives.

Among these illustrous names, perhaps not so near as some others, is that of Epaphras who shines so brilliantly in his own sphere. The Lord has given him a place of honour on the page of Inspiration. His name occurs only three times in the New Testament, twice in the Epistle to the Colossians and once in the letter to Philemon, but this threefold mention of him is an encouragement to all who are truly exercised of heart.

The labour of this gracious brother was twofold; first, the preaching of the gospel and the ministry of the Word among the Colossians (Col. 1:7); and, second, the work of intercession on their behalf (Col. 4:12). In both

aspects of his work, his heart was earnestly engaged for the well-being of the church at Colosse and the testimony there. The second aspect of his ministry should be especially interesting to all who are concerned with the welfare of God's beloved people. The picture of Epaphras drawn by the Holy Spirit is that of a warrior engaged in combat. In chapter 4:12 he is seen on his knees agonizing, not in the posture of defeat, but in close triumphal grips with the enemy. The battle is for the Lord's heritage. He prays so that the saints may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. This would mean, not merely God's will for them as to their personal lives, but the full knowledge of His comprehensive purposes of grace. Epaphras reminds us very much of one of David's mighty men, "Shammah" whose name means renown. This man of faith defended a patch of lentiles, a God-given inheritance, against the Philistines, and through his valour, the Lord gained a great victory and wrought salvation for Israel (2 Sam. 23:11-12). Surely, Epaphras stands spiritually as in the place of Shammah, and, likewise, through him the Lord gained a mighty victory. Shammah fought that God's earthly people might possess and enjoy the "heritage of the Lord," Epaphras in his turn laboured to a similar end, that God's heavenly people might possess the knowledge of, and have great delight in, the riches in Christ.

There was error abounding at Colosse so Epaphras sought out the Apostle in order to inform him of this departure and to counsel with him. He then gave himself to prayer that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Surely we need such ministry among the churches today. We need saints who will lay hold in intercession for the people of God, the people of His possession. Happy is the assembly that has an Epaphras in it! It is difficult to fully understand why God exhorts to intercession, but clearly He does. Moreover, it is evident that no assembly is making spiritual progress without an Epaphras-like ministry.

There is still another point in the history of this godly man; his biography contains in itself a promise to all who engage in similar ministry. An earnest prayer life is an arduous exacting service (chap. 4:12), and much time which might be otherwise spent in legitmate things will have to be sacrificed. Nevertheless, according to the Divine principle, “Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6).

God, during this present period, has openly rewarded this devout and humble brother by placing his name before all saints throughout the many centuries. Intercession is a ministry known only to the Lord, it is a hidden ministry, but, eventually, on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will gain His full approbation and His “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”