

Who was Epaphras?

A coworker of the apostle Paul and a native of Colosse. He was involved in evangelizing and establishing the Colossian church, as Paul clearly reminds them in his letter from prison in Rome: "...since the day you heard of it (the gospel) and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit." (Colossians 1:7-8 NASB). By the time Paul writes his letter to Philemon from this same prison, he mentions Epaphras as his "fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus." (Philemon 23 NASB). Clearly, the Apostle Paul held him in high regard, but the most striking trait Paul indicates about him is found in Colossians 4:12-13 NASB:

"Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, **always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers**, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis."

"Epaphras...**always laboring fervently for you in prayers...**" Col 4:12 KJV.
"Epaphras...**always wrestling in prayer for you...**" Col 4:12 NIV.

The Greek verb translated in Colossians 4:12 NASB as "laboring earnestly" is "agonizomai." It meant to strive, struggle, contend, to enter and carry on a conflict, contest, debate, or legal suit. It was mainly used with the idea of an athletic contest, but it was also used for warfare and battle action. The related Greek noun, "agon," meant a "gathering," or "assembly," especially one that met to see the athletic games. It came to mean the place and spectators in these national games, or the actual contest and the athletes who "contested" for the prizes. Another related Greek noun, "agonia," meaning "agony, anguish, anxiety, contest," is used by Luke in describing Jesus' "agony" in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane... "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly..." Luke 22:44 KJV. The "agonizing" prayer of Gethsemane enabled Jesus to overcome the cross!

Epaphras was always entering the arena of prayer to labor and struggle for the believers in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis...that they would mature and be fully assured in the will of God. Could it be that the rapid church planting expansion flowing from the church in Ephesus (resulting in the seven churches of Asia, including Laodicea, and towns like Colossae and Hierapolis) was the result of Paul's three year ministry in equipping believers, like Epaphras, to contend in the arena of prayer for the growth of the church? Think about it! Ordinary believers, like Epaphras...not just big name apostles

or prophets...contending in the arena of prayer brought about rapid and significant church growth in the province of Asia (Acts 19:9-10). What might God do in your region, if you began contending in the arena of prayer?

Paul used these same Greek words to tell the Colossian believers that he too had entered the arena of prayer in striving and struggling for their maturity in Christ...

"We proclaim Him (Jesus)...so that we may present every man complete (mature) in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, **striving** (agonizomai) according to His power, which mightily works within me. For I want you to know how great a **struggle** (agon) I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face." (Col. 1:28-2:1 NASB). Add to this his comments earlier in chapter 1... "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it (their salvation), **we have not ceased to pray for you** and to ask that you be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." (Col. 1:9 NASB).

Clearly Paul understood the connection between the "agonizing" contest of prayer and the maturing of the church and the effective evangelism of the church, because he not only continually engaged in prayer for others, but he requested they do the same for him (for his effectiveness in evangelism)...

"Finally, brethren, **pray for us** that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;" II Thess. 3:1 NASB.

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; **praying at the same time for us** as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak." Col 4:2-4 NASB.

"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and **pray on my behalf**, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel." Eph 6:18-19 NASB.

Arise 2033 will require the IPHC to engage in effective evangelism and church planting, and for that to happen, we will need an **Epaphras Army** to ALWAYS "agonize" in the arena of prayer...producing a mature church, effectively evangelizing and rapidly multiplying!