

Colossians 4:10-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-4/colossians-410-13/>

Paul lists all the men with him who pass on greetings to the Colossian believers. Some are Jewish believers, others are Gentiles.

We do not know much about *Aristarchus*. Here Paul refers to him as my *fellow prisoner* (vs 10). Whereas the description of Tychicus in verse 7 (“fellow bond-servant”) could either refer to shared circumstance or shared mission, Paul’s use of the word *prisoner* here is literal: Paul and *Aristarchus* are in prison together.

Aristarchus is first mentioned in the Book of Acts in relation to a riot in Ephesus. It says *Aristarchus* is a Macedonian from Thessalonica. In that story, a mob seizes *Aristarchus* (and another companion). Paul’s preaching had upset some idol-crafters and they could not find Paul. It is possible Paul is mentioning *Aristarchus* here because his name had become renowned after the Ephesus riot. He also could have been connected to the people of Colossae in some other way, such as a previous visit.

Paul mentions that *Aristarchus sends you his greetings*. Another companion is listed next: *and also Barnabas’s cousin Mark* (vs 10). This is very likely the same *Mark* who wrote the Gospel that bears that name. Paul says of *Mark*; *about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him* (vs 10).

In Acts 13-15, *Mark* is a part of the company led by Paul and *Barnabas*. For reasons undisclosed, *Mark* decided to leave the expedition (Acts 15:38). This came after a time of fruitlessness in Cyprus, so perhaps *Mark* was discouraged at the results of the work. Some time later, Paul wanted to go back and visit the churches he and *Barnabas* established. *Barnabas* wanted to take *Mark*, his cousin, but Paul refused to on account of *Mark’s* previous desertion.

This led to a split—*Barnabas* and *Mark* go on one journey and Paul takes *Silas* as his companion on another. This seems likely to have been known to the Christian believers throughout Asia Minor. Paul makes it clear in this verse to the Colossians that *Mark* is to be welcomed. They are all on the same team. Irrespective of any past dispute, they are all working for the same Master.

Paul’s third named companion in this passage is *Jesus who is called Justus*. This is the only mention of *Justus* in all of Scripture.

Of these three men, Paul says: *these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me* (vs 11). When Paul says these fellow workers are *from the circumcision*, it means they are Jewish. The rest of Paul’s companions at this time are Gentiles. Paul had other faithful fellow Jewish companions in his ministry (Acts 18:2; Romans 16:3). This refers to the *only fellow workers* with Paul at that time, who have been with him to comfort him in his affliction.

Next, Paul moves to share greetings from some of the Gentile men. He begins with a familiar one: *Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings* (vs 12). In chapter 1, *Epaphras* was mentioned as a direct connection to the believers of Colossae:

“just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf.”
(Colossians 1:17)

Epaphras was local to Colossae (*one of your number*). Paul uses the term *bondsslave*, the same word he used to describe Tychicus a few verses earlier, to refer to someone who is committed to serving the same mission. Epaphras joins the chorus and *sends you his greetings*.

Paul gives further witness to *Epaphras* and his importance. He says *Epaphras is always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God* (vs 12).

The word translated *laboring earnestly* is “agonizomai.” It is where we get the English word “agony.” It literally means striving to win, entering a contest, like in a competitive setting. Epaphras is *always*, literally—“at all times”—competing on behalf of the Colossians, to serve them in their mutual mission to live out and to spread the gospel of Jesus.

The tool for Epaphras’ labor is *prayer*. *Epaphras* is interceding on behalf of the Colossians. He is asking God to help guide them so *that they may stand perfect*. The word *perfect* here (Greek “teleios”) means “complete.” To come to a conclusion. The goal is that the Colossians may grow in maturity so that they are able to finish their race, and completely and confidently *stand* as having living faithfully in the will of God.

Epaphras’ *prayers* also include the intercession that the Colossians become *fully assured*. In other words: completely persuaded, convinced that the *will of God* is the best course for them. This would infer that *Epaphras* is praying that the Colossians will see and believe that God’s will for them is for their best.

If *Epaphras* is competing, it means there is an adversary, an enemy, a competitor. He is struggling for something over and against something else. The inference here is that there are other ways to perceive, but that *Epaphras* believes the best path of life is to *stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God* (vs 12). The phrase *fully assured* can also be translated “made full.” Epaphras’ prayer is not for the Colossians to live partially in God’s will. Rather it is for them to live fully and completely in *the will of God*. As Paul testifies elsewhere, the *will of God* is for each believer to be sanctified, walking in obedience to Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The inference is that Epaphras is praying that the Colossians will be fully and completely sanctified unto Christ in their daily walk.

Paul doubles down on this claim about *Epaphras*: *For I testify for him*. Paul is reiterating and emphasizing how strong *Epaphras*’ work is and how much he sees it on a daily basis.

Paul's testimony is this: *that he has a deep concern for you* (vs 13). The phrase *deep concern* is made up of two Greek words. "Polys" is the Greek word that means "many" or "much." "Ponos" is the Greek word that means "pain," "trouble," or "desire." So, this *deep concern* is an intense longing. A passionate desire. The kind of thing we are talking about when we say we love so much that it hurts.

It is not just for Colossae that *Epaphras* is concerned, it is also *for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis*. These are neighboring towns with local churches, with whom Paul will later instruct the Colossians to share this letter. Paul is likely here trying to express Epaphras' genuine concern for both his home town and his home area. He is also trying to bridge the three communities of believers, to strengthen them together in awareness and intimacy. It is to this end that Paul turns next to conclude the letter to the Colossians.

Biblical Text

¹⁰ Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave 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. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.