

The Christian Worker in Colossians

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon presents a composite portrait of the ideal Christian worker, highlighting various qualities and ministries that are essential for effective service.

Topics: "Faithfulness in Ministry", "Christian Service"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the characteristics of a Christian worker as depicted in Colossians, emphasizing the importance of inspiring others and the diverse roles within the body of Christ. He highlights figures such as Tychicus, the faithful minister; Epaphras, the prayerful minister; and Aristarchus, the suffering minister, each representing different aspects of service and dedication. Simpson encourages believers to fulfill their ministries with faithfulness, prayer, and love, drawing on the examples of Paul and others who exemplified true Christian service. The sermon calls for a commitment to serve God in various capacities, whether in prayer, support, or active ministry, and to recognize the value of every role in the church.

Transcript

"A faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord" (Col. 4:7).

We have had the picture of Christ and of the Christian in Colossians. Now let us study the composite portrait of the Christian worker as presented in the different ideals set forth in this delightful apostolic letter. One of the highest qualities of a great life is to inspire others with its own spirit and aims, and reproduce its work in other workers. The divine Master has done more through the workers that He called and commissioned than through His own personal ministry. And so the great Apostle Paul had the peculiar gift of setting others to work and so communicating to them the principles and objects for which he lived that his life and work were reproduced in them. Paul was the center of a glorious cluster of men and women who finely represent the manifold gifts and ministries of the Spirit. A number of them are brought to the front in the incidental allusions and the personal salutations of this epistle, and as we have said, they together form a composite picture of the ideal Christian worker.

I. TYCHICUS, OR THE FAITHFUL MINISTER (Col. 4:7, 8).

This is a very simple but a very high picture of a true minister of Christ. First of all he is "a beloved brother," for it is more important to be than to do. His personal character is the foundation of his public work. Then he recognizes himself as a servant, "a fellow servant of Paul." For the fundamental idea of service is divine ownership and entire dedication to the Master and His work. But above everything else he

is "a faithful minister." He may not have been brilliant, but he is true, and this is the highest testimony that can be given to a servant. He can be depended upon. He is thoroughly reliable and he is always ready for whatever message or trust his leader had to commit to his hands. On the present occasion he was sent from Rome to carry this epistle and to bear the greeting of the Apostle to the church at Colosse, and he was just as ready to be an errand boy and a messenger as a teacher or an apostle. He was also a minister of comfort. The Apostle sent him that "he might comfort their hearts." The true minister must have a heart of sympathy and the power to cheer and comfort the distressed. Beloved, can it be said of us whatever ministry as pastor, evangelist, elder, Sabbath School teacher, parent, that we have been faithful ministers of Jesus Christ?

II. EPAPHRAS, OR THE PRAYERFUL MINISTRY (Col. 4: 12).

This beloved brother was a member of the Colossian church, and in the testimony that Paul bears to him he knows that he is appealing to the people that are acquainted with him and that mere idle words have little weight unless his life bears out the testimony. The ministry of Epaphras was the power of prayer, that silent ministry that the world knows nothing of, but counts in heaven. It is the work of our great High Priest above, and it is, perhaps, the most potent work that any of us do below. It is no easy dream of sentimental feeling, but a strong and forceful energy "laboring fervently for you in prayers." This is the power that stands behind every great spiritual movement. The world may see the man who stands upon a platform or leads the advance movement on the field, but mightier than either is the silent heart that wrestles in the closet and brings the power from on high. This was the ministry of Epaphras, and this is the holy priesthood to which God is calling many of His people.

His prayers were very definite and practical. We are accustomed to hear the conventional request for prayer that somebody may be converted or healed, or that deliverance may come in some exigency of life. But here we find a man making his business to pray for three whole churches, and to hold them up continually to God in intercession that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." He was asking for no special emergency, but simply for sustaining grace and sanctifying power, and standing like a great supply pipe in some complicated system of waterworks, whose business it was to convey the water from the reservoir to the various places of distribution. This is exactly the figure used by the prophet Zechariah in his picture of the supernatural supply of the Church of God with heavenly power, where the two anointed ones are compared to the pipes that convey the oil to the various lamps. It is the ministry of believing and habitual prayer. Happy the church that has such ministers of the inner sanctuary, such waiting ones to stand before the Lord with the names of His people upon their hands and upon their hearts in the exercise of an everlasting priesthood. Epaphras had consecrated himself to this work and had a great zeal for it, praying with all his heart for his brethren, not only in Colosse, but for the church in Laodicea of Hierapolis. Beloved, is there not here a lesson and a pattern for you? Have you been true to your ministry of prayer, and are there souls that are famishing, churches that are barren, and fields that are neglected because you have come short in this highest ministry of the children of God?

III. ARISTARCHUS, OR THE SUFFERING MINISTRY

"Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner" (Col. 4: 10). Here we have one engaged in no active service, with silent lips and activity restrained by the fetters of a prison cell. But he can suffer along with his friend. He can bear the reproach and share the loneliness of the Apostle's life. He is one of the shut-in ones. His ministry is suffering love. A high and noble ministry indeed it is. Nanssen, the Norwegian traveler, dedicated his book to his wife in these terms: "To her who christened my boat, and then had the courage and the love to

let me go forth alone." Hers was the part of heroic suffering. And while her brave husband went out into the darkness of the frozen North, she waited alone until at last the suspense and suffering became so great that the physicians would not allow his name to be mentioned in her presence, even by her little child, for fear the pressure would snap the last thread of reason and of light. Such is the service of many a mother who waits at home while her boy goes to the mission field or the martyr's grave; many a sister who sacrifices earth's fondest ties to bear the unselfish burden of her home; many a daughter, who gives up affection, wifehood, high Christian work and the ambitions of active life that she may wait as a prisoner of the Lord by some mother's couch, or comfort and sustain the old age of some infirm, dependent father. Such is the ministry of those royal hearts who stand for the sake of principle and some high and holy friendship, sharing the reproaches of some cause which is unpopular, some Christian leader and worker who is misrepresented or maligned, some trust to which the heart has become committed in honor and duty, prisoners of Jesus Christ held back by circumstances which you cannot control, from work which you would love to do, from activities for which every fiber of your being is reaching out, while you can only suffer in silence and find comfort in remembering, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

IV. ONESIMUS, OR THE CONSECRATED SERVANT AND THE HUMBLE HELPER (Col. 4: 9)

Onesimus was a runaway slave who had been found by Paul at Rome and converted through his ministry, and whom the Apostle, with a very tactful letter, was sending back to Philemon, his former master. A happy play is made upon his name, which means "profitable," and which Paul uses as an augury of the future, hoping that he may now prove as profitable as he was unprofitable before. Onesimus is here introduced to them with high honor as one of themselves, and called a faithful and beloved brother. There is no hint of humbler station or his disgraceful fault in escaping from his master. There is a fine tone of Christian ethics about this epistle in dealing with the question of master and servants. There is no encouragement to neglect the servant's duty, but there is the clear recognition of the equality of all men before God, and in the Church of Jesus Christ. In Colossians 3: 22-25 those of them who were in menial and servile positions are reminded that they are to consider themselves the servants of Jesus Christ and look over the heads of unjust and unkind masters, and work "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God" and doing everything heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. They are reminded that they shall receive their reward from the heavenly Master, and that there is no respect of persons with Him, but that every wrong done them will be justly punished by Him, and that every service will be recompensed likewise.

Many of us are in similar positions. The curse of slavery is gone, but the law of service is perpetual, and there is high and holy work to be done for Christ in our various positions of dependence and responsibility to human employers. Many a girl in some ungodly household in this city has been used of God in her laundry and her kitchen through her bright and happy face and the sweet temper which the grace of Christ gives, to lead her mistress to seek for higher things. Many a nurse girl in what might be called the monotony of her life of drudgery and care has exercised an influence upon some child's heart that has given the inspiration of all its future life. In the great world of nature there are millions of blades of grass for one lofty oak or pine, and in the economy of grace there are innumerable little ministries that must be done by someone. It is there that Christian character tells, and that service for Jesus may be made up of many little things. Down in the slums of New York a woman was seen picking up something from the street and hiding it in her apron. A policeman rudely arrested her and demanded to know what she was stealing. She opened her apron and said "Oh, I was just picking up the bits of broken glass that I saw on the pavement for fear the little barefooted children should step on them and get hurt." It wasn't much to the rough

policeman who dismissed her with a coarse laugh, but it was much to the Master.

V. MARK, OR THE RECLAIMED BACKSLIDER (Col. 4: 10).

Mark was one of those young enthusiasts who are always stepping out before they are ready, and attempting some greater prize without counting the cost. Mark had been brought up in luxury in the home of Mary, his wealthy mother in Jerusalem. Her home was the rendezvous of the Early Church, and as he was accustomed to meet the great leaders on familiar terms, he imagined that he was farther on than he was. So when the first great missionary party started, Mark was one of the volunteers and he went along with Paul and his uncle Barnabas. But when they got up into the highlands of Asia Minor and found themselves amid the barren cliffs and savage people of Pisidia and Pamphylia, he became disheartened and, like many other young missionaries, wanted to go home to his mother, and practically deserted his mission. Paul was disgusted, for the time at least, with the new recruit, and would not have him on their next mission. But Barnabas stood by him and took him as his associate, and by and by even Paul was glad to send for him, and say, bring Mark even to Rome, and the terrors of Nero's presence, "for he is profitable to me for the ministry." There still are Christian workers who have to fail before they can succeed. God has to chasten their young enthusiasm and humble their self-confidence, and in the end, like Peter, they are better for their humbling fall. Do not get discouraged if you have started once and gone back, but start again, and when self has died and you have thoroughly learned that you are utterly insufficient in yourself, then God can use the things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are and make the very Valley of Achor a Door of Hope.

VI. DEMAS, OR A REAL BACKSLIDER (Col. 4: 14).

There is something very sad and hollow in the mention of Demas in this epistle, when we remember Paul's later announcement, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Mark, the deserter, comes back. Demas, the friend, goes back to return no more. The difference of the two men was all in the heart. Mark failed, but still loved the Lord. Demas kept up the appearance of a Christian worker for a while, but he loved the present world. In the beautiful park at our Grimsby Convention, we saw a striking illustration of the sad story of Demas. A great tree had just fallen across one of the avenues. Its form had been most stately, its branches spreading and symmetrical, its leaves green and verdant, but as it fell we noted that for months and years it had been hanging as by a thread. There was a thin rim of wood fiber around the outside just beneath the bark scarcely an inch thick, and the whole heart was filled with rotteness, the wood decayed and filled with parasites and worms. Its heart was false and had been all the time, and it only needed one touch of the testing storm to overthrow it. Such is the life that is maintaining the semblance of service in profession while the heart is set on earthly things, which can only end like Demas. Awake, dear friend, in time, and ask God to save you from a divided heart and to make you true to Him.

VII. LUKE, THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN (Col. 4: 14).

Here we find a man in professional life rising above and reaching beyond his professional duties, and accomplishing the noblest service for God and man. For Luke became the friend of Paul, the author of one of the most beautiful and valuable of the Gospels, and the chronicler of the history of the Early Church.

So God loves to use men in unconventional ways. The need of the Church today is not a larger number of ordained clergymen, but a larger number of men and women in social, secular and professional life whose entire influence and talents are at the service of the Master; not a salaried and dependent priesthood who

preach the Gospel because it is expected of them merely, but a great body of consecrated irregulars, Nehemiahs, Josephs, Esthers, Daniels, who use their earthly station in the providence of God as a standpoint from which to serve and witness for their heavenly Master, and bless their fellow-men.

VIII. NYMPHAS, OR THE CHURCH IN HIS HOUSE (Col. 4:15).

Here we have a consecrated home. The Early Church had no ecclesiastical edifices. Its sanctuary was the family circle. Mary of Jerusalem, Priscilla of Corinth and Ephesus, "Gaius mine host," and many an "elect lady" and public-spirited man had the high honor of making his house another Bethany, and entertaining the ascended Lord, and the infant Church. Christian families, how are you using your homes for God? In our great and lonely cities there are hundreds of young men who have come from happy home circles, but have little social life except what they find in the club, the theater, the ballroom or the fashionable call. What a blessing it would be to these boys at the crisis of their young manhood to have the advantage of a truly Christian home circle to visit. What a ministry the refined and consecrated woman could exercise! And even the humblest home can be consecrated to the cottage prayer meeting, the parlor meeting, the gathering together in His name of the two or three who often constitute the nucleus of some great spiritual movement, and whose counsels and prayers reach farther frequently than the great ecclesiastical assemblies. There is little doubt that a majority of our best Alliance branches have had their birth in some little home circle of united faith and prayer. May the Holy Spirit give us to see the ministry of many a modern Nymphas and the Church in his house.

IX. ARCHIPPUS, OR THE FAITHFUL MINISTER

"Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. 4: 17).

This may apply to any ministry whether as pastor, elder, Sabbath School teacher, evangelist, mission worker or even parent. Whatever our service, let us be true to it. Even your little Sunday School class may hold in it all the possibilities of a noble and happy life for some of those young hearts to whom God has given you not only as their teacher, but perhaps the only safe mooring and uplifting influence in all their life. It is not so much the instruction you give them that tells, as the advantage of having in you a friend, a guide, a mature and experienced example and guardian of their undeveloped hearts and lives. Are you doing your best, or have you neglected your trust and allowed some little ship to break to pieces upon the rocks because your light has gone out?

X. PAUL, OR THE IDEAL MINISTER

But all these patterns meet in the one great life around which they clustered, the great Apostle himself, of whose faithful ministry we have so many striking intimations even in this little epistle.

(a) We see the deep foundation of it in a life of prayer. "Praying always for you"(Col. 1: 3). "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col. 2: 1). Here we find him praying not only for his acquaintances but for multitudes that he had never met, and holding men to God as "with hooks of steel."

(b) His love was the impulse of his ministry. His heart was with his people. "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order. and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2: 5).

(c) The spirit of self-sacrifice. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister" (Col. 1 : 24, 25). His very life was laid down on the altar of sacrifice, and it was his greatest joy to bear their burdens and share with their great High Priest all their needs and sufferings.

(d) He was a minister of the truth. "I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." His commission was to preach God's Word, and especially to carry to men that deeper mystery of the Gospel as the fountain of a deeper life in Christ; that wondrous message of the Christ life which has transformed so many millions of lives, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 25-27).

(e) His fidelity. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). He dealt individually with men. He did not try to please them, but to save them. He felt that he must present them one by one at last to his glorious Master and that he stood as one that must give account, and therefore his work must be well done and ready for the testing fire. We cannot always be pleasant with people, but sometimes our faithfulness may seem severe. I think it is General Booth who tells the story of a little girl who prayed that God would save the little rabbits from being caught in her brother's traps, and after she had prayed quite a while, wound up by saying, "Dear, Jesus, I know You will." Her mother asked her why she was so sure that her prayer would be answered. "Why," she said, "Mamma, I smashed the traps." We must not only pray for the souls and point the better way, but uncover and destroy the devil's snares that beset so many heedless lives.

(f) The supernatural power behind his ministry. "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1 :29). This is the secret of every effectual ministry; not I, but Christ, the outworking of a life that flows from the inworking of the living One. God is waiting to give such a ministry to every single-hearted servant. He does not ask us for service until He first gives it. He will fill us with His love and clothe us with His power and when all is done help us to say, "I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Amen.

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