

Studies in Colossians
Today's Lesson 4:7-18

- I. Introduction, 1:1-14
- II. The Role of the Apostle 1:24-2:5
- III. The Warnings of the Apostle, 2:6-23
- IV. The Exhortations of the Apostle, 3:1-4:6
- V. Greetings and Commendations from the Apostolic Team, 4:7-14
This is a rather amazing paragraph providing insight into the life and ministry of the apostle. Clearly, he was a team player, not a loner, in the work of the ministry. He was a man that had a large enough heart to appreciate and promote the ministry of others. What we have here is a description of the ministry team in Rome at the time of Paul's first imprisonment (60-62 AD). It is an interesting composite. Most are Gentiles, products of Paul's missionary endeavors (Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Luke, Epaphras). One is a former rebellious slave (Onesimus), another a doctor by profession (Luke). One was born with some degree of significant wealth (Mark). One had an earlier ministry failure but recovered well (Mark), another seemed to fail at the end (Demas). Of one we know little (Justus); of another we learn that Paul was very endeared to him for his labors (Epaphras). Two men wrote accounts of the ministry of Jesus (Mark and Luke), two are quite anonymous (Justus and Demas). All were commendable for their labors. Though women are often prominent in the story of the spread of the gospel (Pricilla), none are mentioned. Five on the team were Gentiles and three Jews making an illustration of what Paul wrote to the Ephesians (the wall of religious separation has been dissolved).

In Paul's letter to the Romans (57 AD) is an extended list of people that he knows in the empire's capitol. Of the twenty-six named eleven are women. Phoebe, a lady of wealth and servant in the assembly at Cenchrea (16:1-2) heads the list. A couple, Priscilla and Aquila, labored in Ephesus and Rome. Several of the names were common of slaves (Hermes, Julia). Two, Tertius and Quartus, appear to be slaves since they have no names only a number (third and fourth). Some were in the upper class such as Aristobulus, a grandson of Herod the Great and a friend of Emperor Claudias (v. 10). Narcissus [v. 11] had an influence on Claudius. Rufus [v. 13] may have been the son of Simon the Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross

(Mark wrote his gospel from Rome and is the only one to mention Simon's son [15:21]).

The point is simply this: the house churches in Rome reflected a composite of society, but without the hierarchy in earthly status. From the impoverished slave to wealthy, well-placed men and women each member was equal in Christ. The churches were a polyglot.

A. Tychius, vv. 7-8

Apparently, this servant of the Lord (his name means "fortuitous") was the bearer of the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians (6:21-22) after the Third Missionary Trek. We know that he was from Asia Minor (Acts 20:4), most likely Ephesus. He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the love gift from the Gentile communities for the impoverished Jewish Christians. He was a trusted legate of the apostle. Later, he accompanied Paul between his imprisonments and labored with him on the island of Crete (Titus 2:12). He remained with Paul in the work being mentioned in II Timothy 5:12, having been sent to Ephesus to replace Timothy freeing him to come to Paul in Rome.

B. Onesimus, v. 9

This man (his name means "useful") was a runaway slave that Paul met during his imprisonment in Rome and who came to the Savior (Phile. v. 10). His owner, Philemon, had a church in his home in Colossae. He ran away from his master, likely stealing to finance himself, and in Rome met his true master, Jesus Christ. The letter tells us much about the monumental change Christianity brought in social relations (a theme of James). Paul addresses the error of class distinctions before the Lord in the churches. In the letter Paul pleads for Philemon's acceptance of Onesimus demonstrating the apostle's ability to frame arguments (*Philemon's love for the saints [v. 7], the prerogative of command, but an appeal in love [vv. 8-9], Paul's age and situation [v. 9], Paul's relationship to Onesimus "my child" [v. 10], a useless man who has become useful [v. 11], Paul's heart-affection for Onesimus [v. 12], an appeal to his willingness as opposed to command [v. 14], Paul's willingness to pay for Onesimus' thievery [v. 18], a reminder of Philemon debt to Paul [v. 19], and a plan to personally visit him [v. 22]*).

C. Aristarchus, v. 10a

A Jewish man (his name means "best ruler") is described as a faithful Macedonian from Thessalonica (Second Missionary Journey) and is here described as a fellow prisoner (Phile. v. 24). He accompanied Paul on the third missionary journey and was accosted by a mob in Ephesus (Acts

19:29); and later journeyed with Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2) after accompanying Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). He is described as a “prisoner and fellow worker.”

D. Mark, v. 10b

Also known as John Mark, this man is normally associated with the ministry of Peter. His mother was a Jerusalemite and a church met in her home (Acts 12:12) suggesting a wealthier background. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch after the famine relief visit (Acts 12:25) and then on the first missionary journey only to fail and return home (Acts 13:13). Paul refused Mark’s accompaniment on the second missionary journey and a rift (Acts 15:36-39) came between Paul and Barnabas (he then took his nephew Mark with him to Cyprus for the work and Paul took Silas to Asia and Europe). Mark does not appear in Acts but seems to have regained Paul’s confidence (Phile v. 24, II Tim 4:11). That Mark is introduced through Barnabas suggests that the Colossians knew Barnabas at least by name.

E. Jesus (Justus), v. 11

Justus in Latin (“the Just One”) or “Jesus or Joshua” (“deliverer”) in Hebrew was a Jew from Jerusalem on Paul’s team. He is denominated as one who comforted Paul in his imprisonment. He was likely a loyal companion who worked alongside Paul in spreading the Gospel, standing by him while others did not. Otherwise, there is no information about Justus.

F. Epaphras, vv. 12-13

Epaphras was a missionary through whom the gospel was brought to Colossae (1:7). He is the only person that Paul designates, other than himself, as “a bond slave of Jesus Christ.” He brought communication to Paul about the situation in the Colossian church occasioning the letter to them.

G. Luke, v. 14a

As Mark, Luke wrote an account of the ministry of Jesus; additionally, he composed the Book of Acts making him the most prolific writer of the NT corpus. The “we” sections of Acts indicates that He accompanied Paul in Greece during the second missionary journey as well as the journey to Jerusalem after the third missionary journey and then to Rome. He seems to have been the only non-Jew to write Holy Scripture (Col 4:11). By trade, he was a physician. Tradition says he was from Antioch, Syria.

H. Demas, v. 14b

Little is known of Demas except for his participation in the ministry effort including the first imprisonment in Rome. The departure in the second Roman imprisonment signifies a painful betrayal, where a close co-worker abandoned the ministry, and Paul, during a time of great need, preferring

worldly comfort (“...loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica” [II Tim 4:10]). Unlike Mark, who cratered young but recovered to be a model servant, Demas cratered late and left Paul, the pressure likely being too great. He is mentioned with no words of recognition or commendation.

VI. Conclusion, 4:15-18

A. Instructions concerning the Laodiceans, vv. 15-17

1. To greet the believers, v. 15

Laodicea was located about ten miles northwest of Colossae. As is frequent in the early experience of the church, it met in a home, that of a lady (there are numerous such instances in NT), Mary, mother of John Mark, in Jerusalem [Acts 12:12]; Philemon’s house in Colossae [Phile v. 2]; Lydia’s home in Phillippi [Acts 16:15, 40]; Gaius in Corinth [Rom 16:23]) are examples.

2. To send this letter to them, v. 16a

Paul’s letters were often circular; that is, they were to be passed among the churches.

3. To receive the letter written to them, v. 16b

The letter from the Laodiceans, apparently now lost, was to be read in Colossae.

B. Instructions to encourage Archippus, v. 17

Archippus appears to be a leader in the Colossae church. He is mentioned in Philemon (v. 2) as a “fellow worker.”

C. Final comments, v. 18

1. The authenticity of the letter, v. 18a

Often Paul used a secretary or amanuensis to record his letters, perhaps due to eye deterioration contracted on the first missionary journey (Gal 6:11) but added concluding comments to assure his readers that the letters were not fraudulent (I Cor 16:21, Gal 6:11, II Thess 3:17, Philemon 19).

2. A call to prayer, v. 18b

3. A blessing, v. 18c

Thoughts:

1. Onesimus is a striking figure to me. His name means “useful” but he was a worthless, disobedient slave in the home of man that was a devout Christian, Philemon. He ran from his master, likely stealing property from him, for Rome to be lost in the masses of slaves in the city. Somehow, he met Paul the prisoner and he became free indeed (Paul the enslaved brought freedom to a man in slavery!). Onesimus returned to his master to be a member of

Philemon's house church and a trusted servant of God. What an amazing story of how the gospel can change people. The gospel changes a derelict slave into a "useful" servant. In what sense is it your story also?

2. The list of Paul's assistants, the team, in the work of the gospel is interesting. They are quite diverse in backgrounds, social status, ethnicity, and experience. Mark seems to be a person of social standing; Onesimus had none as a slave. Mark was initially disappointing, but somehow has his life turned around. Demas began well but seems to have ended poorly. Life has expected turns for all of us; you do not know whom the Lord will chose to use and not; you do not know who will begin in a hopeful path yet be derailed; you cannot fathom who will experience failure but end well. Can you think of people that fit these categories from your experiences? What do these various experiences teach us about the body of Christ?
3. Paul tells us to remember his imprisonment. Surely his request is for prayer for God's deliverances whatever that might entail, for the effectiveness of his witness, and for the health of the churches he ministers to through the missionary team. This makes me think of the persecuted churches in our world, places like Pakistan, the Sudan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and China. Many are suffering for their allegiance to the Savior. Do you hold them up in your prayers? I read the "World News Section" of the Dallas Morning News daily and that often becomes my prayer list as I think of Christians in the various countries marked by hostility and strife.
4. The ending of the letter contains a message that we all need no matter our circumstance in life's journey. We need the light of the favor and mercies of God to shine upon us every day. In what ways today, do you think Paul's concluding words are applicable to you, to your loved ones, to AGG, to our church, to our nation?