

The Supremacy of Christ The Gospel Encourages Participation Colossians 4:7-18

Introduction

Today is our final message on the letter to the Colossians and the Supremacy of Christ. As we learned Colossae was a city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), situated in the Lycus River valley about 110 miles south-east of Ephesus. It was a prominent city in classical Greek times because of its importance in producing dyed wool and its location on the trade route between Ephesus and the East.

It was close to two other cities, Hierapolis and Laodicea, both mentioned in the New Testament. These two cities gradually eclipsed Colossae, and by the time Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians, it was a small and relatively unimportant city.

Paul didn't found the Colossian church, it was one of the churches evangelized by Epaphras, a disciple of Paul's (Col.4.12-13). Epaphras had become alarmed about a cult that was developing in the Colossian church, and since Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he went there to consult with him.

Paul agreed the situation was serious and decided to write a letter to the Colossians. Paul begins his letter by thanking God for the Colossians and their decision to become followers of Christ. He commends them for receiving the "gospel" (the good news that Jesus is the Messiah and that through His death, we can be forgiven and reconciled to God).

Paul also rejoices that the "gospel" is changing their lives. By accepting Jesus and receiving Eternal Life, the Holy Spirit has given them a sense of inner peace and new hope for their lives. That is what the gospel does!

The gospel can change everything about your life. No matter who you are or what you've done, the gospel can change your life the same way it did for Paul and the Colossians if you ask Jesus for forgiveness and let Him into your heart.

This is the Good News Christ has called us to share with our world.

I. (7-9) Regarding Tychicus and Onesimus, messengers of the letter.

Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here. (Colossians 4:7-9 NKJV)

Apparently, the Colossian Christians didn't know who Tychicus was. But Paul sent Tychicus and Onesimus with this letter to the Colossians with more news about how he was doing. Epaphras, who brought the news from Colosse to Paul in Rome, did

not return to Colosse with Tychicus and Onesimus. Acts 20:4 mentions Tychicus as one of the men who carried the offering from Asia to Jerusalem to the needy Christians. According to Ephesians 6:21, Tychicus was also the bearer of the letter to the Ephesians as well.

Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon, a believer in Colosse. Onesimus had run away and somehow came into contact with Paul in Rome, where he became a Christian and dedicated helper to Paul. When Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus, instead of saying he was “the escaped slave who he was sending back to his master.” He called a “faithful and beloved brother.” But anyone can change! We can’t give up on people just because they make wrong choices or bad decisions.

II. (10-11) Greetings from three of Paul’s faithful Jewish friends.

In verse 10, Paul includes greetings from three of his faithful Jewish friends.

“Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.”
(Colossians 4:10-11 NKJV)

Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). Acts 19:29 says that Aristarchus was Paul’s travel companion when the Ephesian mob seized Paul. He was also with Paul when he set sail for Rome as a Roman prisoner, according to Acts 27:2. In this letter, Paul calls him Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner. It seems Aristarchus had a knack for being *with* Paul during hard times.

III. Mark, the cousin of Barnabas

Paul also mentions “Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)” In Acts 13 and 15, we read that Paul had a falling out with both Barnabas and Mark. Paul felt that Mark, who was also called John Mark, had abandoned their missionary team when they left Paphos on the island of Cypress and sailed for Perga in modern-day Turkey (known as Asia at the time). Instead of going with Paul and Barnabas, Mark returned to Jerusalem. Mark’s actions upset Paul, and he refused to let John Mark go with them on their next missionary trip.

But clearly, by the time Paul wrote this letter, all was forgiven. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:11)

The grace of God continues to work in us even if we have been stubborn or belligerent. In time, God’s grace changed Paul and softened him towards others who had previously offended him. Since Paul identifies Mark in terms of his relationships with Barnabas, it seems that the Colossian Christians knew who Barnabas was.

IV. Jesus, who is called Justus:

Paul also includes greetings from Jesus, called Justus. We don't know anything about Justice except for his name and that he is listed among along with Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, and Mark as a comforter and support for Paul while he is in Roman custody, awaiting his trial. Paul says, "These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me." (Colossians 4:10-11 NKJV)

At that time, Paul had only three workers with a Jewish heritage with him. Yet these three were doing a great work and were a real encouragement and comfort to Paul. Paul was in Roman custody because of the Jewish riot that took place on the temple mount over the mere mention of God's offer of grace to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22).

V. (12-13) Greetings from Epaphras.

"Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you and those who are in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis." (Colossians 4:12-13)

Prayer can be hard work, and Epaphras worked diligently at it, especially knowing the danger of the false teaching in Colosse. Epaphras prayed that the Colossian Christians would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. This is a wonderful prayer to pray for anyone.

Paul called Epaphras a bondservant of Christ. It is a phrase that he often applied to himself. The only place Paul called anyone else a bondservant was here, except for Philippians 1, where he speaks of himself and Timothy as *bondservants* of Jesus. Epaphras was a bondservant, and *prayer* was an important area where he worked hard.

His prayers were intense because he deeply cared for and loved his Colossian fellow believers.

VI. (14) Greetings from Luke and Demas.

Verse 14 says, "Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you." (Colossians 4:14)

This is one of the Scripture passages that inform us Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, was a physician. Luke approaches his writings from a historical and analytical viewpoint and includes medical details and observations. We don't know for sure, but maybe Luke was in Rome to give Paul a copy of his recently finished works, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Some writers suggest they were presented together as a "friend of the court" report, explaining to the Romans why Paul stood before Caesar's court.

Demas is only mentioned by name. He greets the Colossian Christians and may have been known to them. In his letter to Philemon, Demas is also grouped among Paul's fellow laborers. The last mention of him is in 2 Timothy 4:10, where Paul writes that Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world, and departed for Thessalonica.

Commenting on Demas, William Barclay writes, "Surely here we have the faint outlines of a study in degeneration, loss of enthusiasm and failure in the faith." (Barclay)

These six individuals were with Paul in Rome during his house arrest while he awaited a trial before Caesar. Paul adds them all to his greeting, which strengthens his words to the Colossians. He wanted them to know that they had not been forgotten and that many people were embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It shows that during this imprisonment – unlike the later one described in 2 Timothy – Paul, though chained, enjoyed at least the occasional company of many friends and associates.

VII. (15) Greeting to Nymphas and the Laodiceans.

"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his house." (Colossians 4:15)

Laodicea is the same city later mentioned in the scathing rebuke of Revelation 3:14-22. Laodicea was a neighbor city of Colosse, along with Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13).

There has been considerable debate whether Paul refers to a man or a woman with this name. Some manuscripts have the masculine form, and some have the feminine. Is this person a woman (Nympha) or a man (Nymphas)? You can find both forms in the manuscript tradition, and the truth is the gender doesn't really matter to us. The point is this person was responsible for a house church.

House churches were quite common in the first-century church. Church buildings didn't begin to appear until the third century. Up to that time, Christian congregations met in houses of those who were the leaders of the Church." (Barclay)

VIII. (16) Instructions for spreading the message in this letter.

Verse 16 says, "Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." (Colossians 4:16)

When Paul and the other apostles wrote letters to churches, the letters were like newsletters and publicly read in the congregations. It was a way for the apostles to teach and instruct a church even when they couldn't personally be there.

It was the general practice to share the letters among the churches, especially those close to each other. The letters were copied almost immediately, which is how slight discrepancies occurred in the manuscripts. Unlike the copying of the O.T. scriptures with painstaking accuracy by trained scribes, the N.T. letters were copied to get the message to other churches as soon as possible.

Apparently, Paul also wrote a letter to the Laodiceans that we do not have today. That doesn't mean the inspiration of the Scriptures is incomplete. Since God is the actual author of the scriptures, the Holy Spirit chose to preserve those letters inspired and needed for the universal church, not just the local church.

Paul was not writing inspired scripture every time he set pen to paper.

IX. (17) A special word to Archippus.

And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." (Colossians 4:17)

This particular word to Archippus is interesting. Paul also mentions Archippus in his letter to Philemon, calling him a fellow soldier and leader of a house church. We don't know if he was burned out, discouraged, or thinking about giving up leadership of the house church. But whatever it was, Paul tells him to hang in there and keep leading by example.

Paul wanted Archippus to be encouraged and strengthened, but he wants the support of the believers at Colossians in telling Archippus how valued and needed he was in God's work. Presumably, he would be present when the letter was read, giving the words even more impact. He needed to hear this from the people around him: "Fulfill your ministry." If the Colossians spoke up, then Archippus would know his ministry was wanted and needed.

Take heed to your ministry! That's God's encouragement to you today! Living and working for Christ may be difficult for you right now, but don't give up! God's plan and purpose includes you! And Christ is counting on you this morning, which means you can count on Christ to supply all that you need to accomplish the mission and work He has called you to do. Paul's encouragement to Archippus also speaks to us regarding some enduring principles of ministry.

- It is God who gives ministry to people.
- Authentic ministry is received and accomplished in the Lord, not in human ingenuity or strength.
- Ministry can be left unfulfilled.
- We must take heed to and be diligent in our ministry to fulfill and finish it and
- We should help and encourage others to fulfill their ministry. (It's not all about you!)

(18) Conclusion.

Paul wanted the Colossian Christians to recognize how important it is to remain in fellowship and ministry with others. The Colossians learned about the gospel from Epaphras, who had been changed by it. We don't know how Epaphras learned about the gospel. Maybe he met some Christians who had real peace and hope, and they explained the gospel to him. However, when he heard the gospel, he put his faith in Jesus and began to experience this same peace and hope and love.

Then the Colossians experienced the same peace and hope and started telling people they knew. That's how the gospel spread all over the Roman Empire during the first century, and it still spreads this same way today. If you have met Jesus and been changed by His grace, then you are fully qualified to spread this gospel to others!

In these final verses, we realize that there are no lone rangers in the kingdom of Christ. God does not call us to do the job of sharing the gospel all by ourselves. We need each other! Our devotion to God and to each other keeps us from being overwhelmed and considering giving up. We cannot live the Christian life in isolation. As difficult as people may be, we still need one another.

Paul closes this letter with verse 18, "This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace, *be* with you. Amen."
(Colossians 4:18)

Following the custom of that day, Paul generally dictated his letters and then personally signed a postscript with his own hand. He writes, "Remember my chains!" Paul had a lot to deal with, and you can feel a lot of emotion and sorrow, and determination in this simple phrase.

Paul knew the confinement and loneliness of prison, but he also had to deal with the uncertainty of not knowing if his case before Caesar's court would end well. Paul probably heard the chains clank as he took the pen to sign the salutation. His references to suffering are not pleas for sympathy; but reminders of his right to speak with the authority of the Savior.

Faithful to his calling, Paul ends with the words, "Grace be with you!" Paul the Apostle of Grace, even when confronting heresy, or elaborately conceived and hidden mysteries, or trying to achieve righteousness through works, reminds us we can only move forward safely in the Christian life if God's grace is within and upon us! So, grace be with you all!