

Colossians 4:7-18 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup> and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

<sup>10</sup> Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. <sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. <sup>16</sup> And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. <sup>17</sup> And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

## Colossians 4:7-18 | Personal Matters

Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae is just that, a letter. That means it is written from a person to a particular group of people at a particular time. It doesn’t stand outside of the day to day workings of the church’s life, but is nested right within them. This is one of the great thrills of Christianity, when we recognize its historicity. Paul is no archetype, but a man. His partners in ministry were not foils but persons. The movement of the gospel is not a philosophical development able to be catalogued in journals and matrices. No it is a movement of the church made up of real people throughout history.

All scripture is God breathed and profitable, so we must ask ourselves why would the Holy Spirit see fit to include the logistics of letter transport, and lists of names who send only greetings? Even including small details and vague instructions that would only be known by the names they are attached to?

Although the particulars of this instruction are not ours God saw fit that his church for all time might listen in. Perhaps the reason is so that we might not be fooled into thinking our theology took place only in books. How simple to consider that our walk with the Lord might be only a matter of getting our ideas straight. How easy it would be to consider only the doctrine, all the while missing the very context in which the doctrine takes on body and moves into the world. This context, this embodying of the doctrine Paul proclaims is the church. It is full of messy

people, odd little details, hopes, disappointments, and all those things that only happen when people come together. Let's listen into the doctrine of the church.

## 1. Tychicus & Onesimus

Colossians 4:7-8 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. <sup>8</sup>I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,

Paul sends one of his most trusted friends with this letter to the church in Colossae. It is likely that he also carried with him the letter to the Laodiceans which is possibly our Letter to the Ephesians in our Bibles and he also carries with him the personal letter to Philemon. Paul gives him reason to be trusted by the Colossians. He is beloved, faithful, and a fellow servant in the Lord. Paul sends him for two purposes. 1) that he might share how Paul is doing and 2) that he might encourage the hearts of the Colossians. But you see these are the same thing in practice.

The greatest of the apostles, and yet in knowing this story and Paul's willingness to receive this suffering the church in Colossae might be certain that in their own suffering God has not abandoned them. When RCD was just beginning as a church we were going through some difficult financial and interpersonal realities within our church and I have to tell you it was the letters of Paul and Peter that encouraged my heart. There is a cottage industry formed around describing the toxic nature of the church and so many people experience that and go away. These people have not heard the stories of the church, they needed a Tychicus.

Colossians 4:9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Sent alongside the beloved Tychicus is another one of Paul's faithful and beloved brothers. But to some in Colossae he would not have seemed this way. Onesimus the runaway slave of Philemon. The one who had been useless previously, is now useful. The one who left as a slave returns as a beloved brother in Christ. A picture of the very gospel Paul has described is here on display in the flesh and blood life of Onesimus. Where does the theology of our reconciliation in Christ alone take place? Where do we see our brotherly equality before the Lord? In the slave sent to report on the greatest apostle. If not there it lies dead as in an unread book.

## 2. Aristarchus, Mark & Justus

Colossians 4:10-11 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus.

Perhaps most interesting in this list of men who send their greetings with Paul is the mention of Mark the cousin of Barnabas. Barnabas was Paul's original missionary travel partner. But when the time came to set out on a second missionary venture and check on the churches they had planted they split over the decision of whether or not to bring along Mark. Paul thought Mark had not proven to be dependable as he had previously withdrawn from their work. But here we start to see glimpses of the reconciliation that is taking place between Paul and Mark following this sharp disagreement. We don't know what the instructions were concerning Mark, but we know he was to be welcomed in Colossae. Mark would go on to partner with Peter, relaying Peter's account of Christ's earthly ministry in the gospel according to Mark.

### 3. Epaphras

Colossians 4:12-13 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

Paul has to mention Epaphras who seems to be the true origin of the letter and the church in Colossae. Epaphras is a Colossian himself and shared with them the gospel of Jesus Christ and since then seems to have partnered directly with Paul. But he spends his time still in the work of the ministry on behalf of the Colossians, Laodiceans and those in Hierapolis. What is his work for them? It is prayer. Epaphras struggles for the Colossians in his prayers for them. And look at what he prays for them. That they would stand mature and assured in all the will of God. Don't you see this intention behind Epaphras' prayers is the very theme of this letter. The letter in a sense is an answer to this prayer. But look at us here reading the letter. Look at the fruit of the struggle in Epaphras' prayers for this one church. It is incalculable.

This is one of the great encouragements to prayer in all of scripture. And notice, Paul does not separate prayer from the work of the ministry. Prayer is the work of the ministry. Let your prayer be a struggle. Discipline your prayer.

### 4. Luke & Demas

Colossians 4:14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.

This is a short mention but its worth noting that this is the second Gospel writer Paul mentions being with. He also mentions Demas. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, Paul explains that Demas abandons Paul as he is "in love with the world." He is a close friend of Paul and Luke, yet he falls away from the faith. The church is always a developing story. Perhaps at the writing of this letter if Paul were to put his money on the

trustworthiness of Mark or Demas he might have chosen Demas. And yet next week in our church we will return to Mark's gospel and Demas is unknown except in shame.

The church is always messy here in real time.

## 5. Laodiceans and Nympha's Church

Colossians 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Laodicea and Colossae are neighbor cities therefore Paul offers greetings to both. And here we also hear about Nympha, a woman likely in Laodicea who hosts a church in her home. We don't hear anything else about her but we get a glimpse into the spread of the church in the area through people's homes.

Colossians 4:16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

The church is becoming united already through the writings of Paul. This letter although to the Colossians Paul already saw fit by the spirit to have it circulated throughout the whole church. And this letter sent to the Laodiceans as I already mentioned is likely the letter to the Ephesians in our Bibles.

## 6. Archipus

Colossians 4:17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

We don't know what this particular ministry is. But we can understand that Archipus knew, and Paul just wanted to encourage him to do it. Isn't the church made up of this. Individuals with callings upon their lives that the church depends upon them receiving and fulfilling. That thing you've received from the Lord, do it.

## 7. Paul

Colossians 4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Paul in prison now takes the pen into his own hand and writes himself what he was likely speaking to a transcriber. He asks for his chains to be remembered and sends this letter as a very means of grace. Here the grace of this letter extends to us, those in the lineage of this church. How do we take it up into our lives.

Become mature in Christ. The way you entered Christ by his grace, so walk in him.