

**Colossians: Full Part 3: Fullness in Fellowship II**  
***Colossians 4:10-14***  
**Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on October 8th, 2023**

**Welcome to the Family**

When I became a believer in Christ, I would discover an amazing sense of family and belonging that I had not ever really experienced before. Coming from a broken, dysfunctional home, family was a foreign concept. But soon enough, in the student ministry and through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Christian friends from school, I was drawn into friendships with my brothers and sisters in Christ according to Scripture.

As I grew in my relationship with God, I was drawn more deeply into relationships with other believers. It was remarkable. Despite being very different, we loved the same thing: Jesus. Even better, they wanted to talk about it and share experiences together in mission and ministry. For a young teenager, this was Biblical *koinonia*, fellowship that is an outgrowth of knowing Christ.

This sense of family was stretched and deepened significantly as I experienced true brotherhood in college, developing friendships that still last and encourage me today. This new life in Christ is the basis upon which all of my lasting peer friendships were and are formed. Turning 49 was a powerful reminder of this as I was wished well in my ever-growing decrepitude by friends from high school, college, and ministry.

This shared mystery of Christ is also the basis for my relationship with my wife, Danielle. In Christ, our hearts beat together as one. She is not only my wife, but also my best friend, my confidante, often my counselor and brings joy and a constant string of surprises into my life.

In Christ, we have developed deep, mutual, soul-level friendships with Christian brothers and sisters that are the most valued treasures that we possess. Often, we find ourselves praying for people who have been in our lives for several years. Christian fellowship that results in deep, impactful friendship, is one of the strongest blessings of knowing Jesus.

The Apostle John explains the beautiful dynamics of Christian fellowship in 1 John 1:3: “...what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the

Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” John was motivated to share the gospel so he could help bring those who heard and responded into fellowship with God the Father and God the Son. This also meant that the new convert would be drawn into fellowship with John and the Church. Because fellowship with God births fellowship with other believers.

The key to the quality of our human fellowship is revealed in the quality of our fellowship with God. Those who have rich fellowship with God have the richest fellowship with other believers. It is strengthened through sharing the same view of reality as they consider the world around them. It is deepened by sharing the same view of self and by comprehending the devastating reality of sin as it affects a person. It is broadened by sharing the same values and morality. Because they share the same love of Christ, his Word and his Church. This means sharing the same hope and the same purpose and the same cause. The gospel.

In Colossians, Paul shares how the fullness of Christ floods our lives and overflows into others. If the others are also believers, their lives also overflow. This means a sense of mutual recognition and refreshment in fellowship. Paul most certainly benefited from this fellowship. In the book of Acts, there are more than 100 different Christians associated with the Apostle Paul. In Romans 16, he names 16 friends! Here in Colossians Paul remained consistent, naming ten people in the closing. We can see the overflowing of the fullness of Christ into the fellowship of the believers. (read text)

### **Cross-Cultural Fellowship**

As Paul winds down his letter, six of his friends send greetings to the Colossian church through Paul from Rome. Three were Jews, three Gentiles. The Jews were Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus called Justus. Paul said that these three were the only Jews who worked with him, and they were a comfort to Paul. Then he named the Gentiles: Epaphras, Luke, and Demas.

It is important to remember that language, national animosities, differences in religious practices, and cultural differences had divided the world up into hostile camps that could only be held together by military power. But under Paul’s influence, both of these extremely different camps were not only meeting together willingly, but they were also meeting together lovingly. What an amazing unity there is to be found in the Gospel.

It seems folks in churches like to major on the minors and divide themselves over temporal, conditional, non-eternal matters. Paul brought them together under the banner of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of those other markers that differentiated them were of lesser importance. If the various camps within the Church cannot come together for the sake of the Gospel, then those who refuse must be confused as to who the Savior truly is: Jesus or some other thing. Only Jesus saves. And that message brought Paul and his companions together.

From the very beginning, Jesus had shown that this was the intent of the gospel. Jesus crossed all of the forbidden barriers in healing lepers, eating with tax collectors, worshiping with prostitutes, receiving children, and imagine how scandalous it was for the Lord to reach out to the Samaritan woman in John 4. The woman was amazed and the Jews who heard about it even more so. Hatred between Judea and Samaria had lasted for over four centuries. Consider that the Jews had maintained their racial purity during the Babylonian captivity and the Samaritans had lost their racial purity by intermarrying with the Assyrian invaders. For Jewish tastes, this was unforgivable.

Add to this that the Samaritans had built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim – only to have the Jews destroy it during Maccabean times. When Jesus lived, bitter hatred reigned supreme. A Jewish prayer even included, “...and Lord, do not remember the Samaritans in the Resurrection.”

Added to this was the fact that it was a Samaritan woman. Strict rabbinical practice forbade teachers to greet women in public. Some Pharisees were called “bruised and bleeding Pharisees” because of their practice of shutting their eyes whenever they saw a woman and would walk into walls and trip into the street. Jesus not only spoke to the woman, but he also used her jug to drink, becoming ceremonially defiled – just all of this was scandalous. Jesus vaulted over the conventional barriers of his day, and in doing so, he modeled one of the supreme glories of the Church. Jesus not only reaches people like you and me, but he also brings us together.

This is what happened in Rome, but it certainly had not been an easy coming together. While the Gentiles in Rome were ready to mix, the Jewish believers legalistically demanded that the Gentiles be circumcised and follow Jewish ceremonial laws. When Paul arrived in Rome, these legalistic Jewish believers did not welcome him warmly.

They even rejected the authenticity of his missionary charge. They didn't agree with his methods, so they might as well cast aspersions on his calling. But here are three Jews named who helped Paul. They were receptive and loving. They understood grace. The Gospel was more important than their religious tradition. And so they sent their greetings to the Colossian church. These three had experienced what Paul called "the fullness of Christ."

It is impossible to hold racial prejudices in the heart and be Spirit-filled; such goes against everything Christ taught and teaches. When a Christian refuses fellowship with other healthy, Spirit-filled believers, there can only be one conclusion: something is wrong in his or her relationship to God. When we have the fullness of fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, we have fellowship and friendship with one another regardless of background. Three Jewish believers in Rome were experiencing fullness in fellowship, and it was overflowing to the church in Colossae.

### **Fellowship Transcends Grievances**

Believers at their worst are capable of holding on to grievances. Two congregations, located only a few blocks from each other in a small rural community, thought it might be better if they would become one united body, and thus a larger and more effective church, rather than two struggling, smaller churches. But they were not able to pull it off. What was the hurdle? They could not agree how to recite "the Lord's Prayer." One group preferred "forgive us our trespasses," while the other demanded, "forgive us our debts." So one church went back to its *trespasses* and the other returned to its *debts*. Believers can be stubborn, unchanging, and unforgiving. But others, like Paul and Mark, are able to forgive and move on.

Earlier, young Mark (John Mark) had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first great missionary journey. They had set out from Antioch and after traveling to Cypress to minister there, Mark abandoned Paul when they reached the shores of Pamphylia and Mark returned to Jerusalem. We do not know why. We can guess from Paul's writings that the difficulties they faced were immense. Later when Paul was planning another missionary journey, Barnabas insisted that Mark come along, and Paul refused. This disagreement resulted in a permanent separation between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas took Mark and Paul recruited Silas.

Paul wasn't running a touring company of the Mediterranean, so he needed to be certain that anyone accompanying him was able to endure significant stress.

Now, twelve years or more later, Mark was in Rome with Paul, ministering to him in prison. As Paul sent Mark's greeting to Colossae, he even commended Mark, saying, "if he comes to you, welcome him." (v.10). In the accompanying letter to Philemon, Paul listed Mark among his "fellow workers" (Philemon 24). And later, at the end of Paul's ministry, he wrote to Timothy, "Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

There was no way that two men who both loved God and were walking in fellowship with him would have not fellowship with one another. This is what true fellowship brings. If two believers cannot be reconciled, then either both or one is not in fellowship with God. If you have an issue with forgiveness, you need the fullness of Christ, because if you are full of Him, you will be more like him. And Christ is forgiving.

### **Fellowship that Is Big-Hearted**

We see how expansive Christian fellowship is in the desire that all six people have to send greetings to believers in Colossae. There is no record of most of those six individuals ever being in Colossae, but they loved the believers there anyway. They understood that they were all a part of each other.

What Paul said about Epaphras suggests something of what the six were like: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis" (vv.12-13).

Epaphras was from Colossae. He had traveled all the way to Rome because he was concerned about Gnostic heresy that threatened to rob the Colossians of their fullness. Epaphras was deeply concerned for his fellow Colossian believers. Paul writes that Epaphras was "wrestling" for them in his prayers. It is from this Greek word that we get our English word *agonized*.

Paul had watched Epaphras pray for Colossae, and this was the one word that best described his prayer. The same root word that was used to describe Jesus' fervent prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).

Epaphras cared deeply. He prayed that the Colossian believers would "stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills." His prayer was specifically directed against the heretics who falsely offered perfection and fullness through their religious system. The Colossians had already had divine perfection in Christ. Epaphras prayed that God would help them to stay there in that divine perfection. It was a selfless, big-hearted prayer.

Paul concluded this brief portrait of Epaphras by saying, "for I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis" (v.13). When a person is in full fellowship with Christ, they naturally take on something of Christ's heart for others, and this overflows in "deep concern." Epaphras' large heart made him vulnerable to the burdens of others.

Also, fullness in fellowship encompasses "marginal" people. Paul concluded greetings with, "Luke, the dearly loved physician, and Demas send you greetings" (v.14). Luke was the only Gentile writer of any book in the New Testament. He was a much-loved Christian, physician, devoted friend, and a careful historian. But Demas is another story. Later Paul would write of him, "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:10). Perhaps Paul was aware of the impending spiritual slide because Demas is the only one of the six that Paul makes no additional comment about in the greeting. Christian fellowship is not meant to be perfect. It must always be stretching.

Edwin Markham once wrote, "Some draw a circle that shut men out; Race and position are what they flout; but Christ in love seeks them all to win, He draws a circle that takes them in." Our Lord Jesus even takes in those who disappoint and hurt. Christian fellowship makes us bigger people who have a greater capacity for sorrow – and for joy.

We have something wonderful to offer to this world. "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

First, we are to offer fellowship with God – not just knowledge of God, but a relationship with God based on the specific truth revealed in God’s word. The gospel further offers a fullness of fellowship with God’s children. This dynamic fellowship overcomes barriers, transcends grievances, and produces big-hearted faith.

Believing in Christ makes this fullness of fellowship possible for everyone, because that is who Christ came for: everyone.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**Wednesday Morning Bible Study at 10:30AM.** Our study continues in Mark.

**FBC Kids Wednesday Nights. 6-7:30PM** See Pastor Jason for details!

**LIGHT THE NIGHT: October 31.** Sign up to volunteer today! We also need prayers for the gospel to be shared, encouraging conversations to be had, and a lot of candy donations! Your help with this is greatly appreciated!

**CORRECTION!!! BUSINESS MEETING: October 30th, 6PM.** Please get your committee/team/ministry's report turned *in this week!* Email it to [contact@fbcmartinsburg.com](mailto:contact@fbcmartinsburg.com).

**THIS PAST WEEK: SUNDAY 10/1/2023**

*OFFERING GIVEN: \$8033.17*

*IN WORSHIP: 150*

*WEEKLY BIBLICAL COMMUNITY: 224*

*WELCOME TO THE FIRST BAPTIST FAMILY!*

- Chris and Allison Loizos (statement)*
- Jaron and Melissa Monholland (statement)*
- Chad Williams (statement)*

**THIS COMING WEEK: Oct.9-13**

**OFFICE HOURS THIS WEEK: M-TH: 8AM-2PM, Closed Friday.**