

## God's Work through God's People

Colossians 4:7–18

<sup>7</sup> 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.

Intro: We read in these closing remarks not just the personal remarks of the Apostle that might have some sentimental value for those who are curious, but we read words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul was carried along by the Spirit, and these words are preserved and inscripturated for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness. They give us a behind-the-scenes look at how God worked through his people to expand his Kingdom. So with that in mind, let's launch into these final remarks. We'll consider 3 main points: **Plurality of Leaders**, **People of God**, and a **Prod to Faithfulness**.

### PRAY

#### I. Plurality of Leaders

Paul was perhaps the greatest Apostle, though he described himself as the least. We are here today because of his missionary work to the Gentiles. But Paul was wise enough, and smart enough, and mature enough to know that the work of God's kingdom is bigger than any one man. So right off the bat, as he goes through this list of people who are with him, serving in some capacity, or believers

that are in the church in Colossae, we learn something about how the church was planted, and grew and proclaimed the Gospel to the ends of the earth. There are 10 people noted in this closing paragraph. Taking into account the letter was written by Paul and Timothy, there are at least 12 people directly involved in providing care and direction to the young church in Colossae. In v. 11, Paul notes the comfort that many have brought him. They relieved the pain and burden of ministry.

The great work of missions, the local work of and ministry of a church plant, the leadership of a church... none of these things is done by the Lone Ranger. God appoints elders with an “s” to provide spiritual leadership to every local expression of his body, the church. And he gifts others in the body to do different types of ministries. God intends for us to be interdependent on each. There are leaders, clearly. But this is not a CEO model that has been popular in America since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

A couple of things to note:

What is implied in this passage is spelled out clearly in others: **Churches are to be served and shepherded by a plurality of elders** who are God’s gift to the church. Leaders need each other, and need to think and reason with each to act with God’s wisdom. I am grateful for Steve — more than you know — and the way God has gifted him. There are entire areas of void for me — areas that, in the providence of God, are his strong suit. We pray together. We think together. And as God gives increase and it is apparent God is sending other elder-qualified to be with us, our small circle will expand. I’m grateful for Joe, and his insight and commitment to the Gospel. Our hearts and minds are directed to Christ each week, and this helps us on Monday through Saturday to stay focused on Christ and his glory and grace.

I’m grateful for others from other churches who have made themselves available to us for counsel and teaching. This is the way God intends it. This is his good plan that keeps us from getting as depressed as Elijah and thinking we are in it alone.

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> point: We need more than pastors... we need each other.**

Several of the people listed in these final verses are pastors and spiritual leaders. But some are not — Nympha is a lady in Colossae who apparently has the gift of hospitality. She takes care of the details, of the extra chairs, of the snacks... She orients her life to serving the church, and is willing to be inconvenienced, if necessary, so that God’s people can meet and focus on worship. So it isn’t just

pastors and leaders who are necessary... All of us function together in the body of Christ for his glory, and to serve and bless each other. If you are part of the body of Christ at Redeemer's Grace, there is a place of service for you. Not just busy work, or a job so that you'll have something to do. There is real work to be done that glorifies God, advances his Kingdom, and serves and encourages his people. There is both a plurality of leaders, and a plurality of servers and "care-ers," if you will.

## II. People of God

We will move quickly through most of these folks, and focus on a few. A good study bible can give you insight into each of these people, so you are smart people and do some homework.

First, Tychicus, who is one of Paul's assistants. Three things are noted about Tychicus: He is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant. That is high praise coming from Paul. He is the trusted bearer of the letter to Colossae, and is mentioned in similar ways in Acts 20, 2 Timothy 4, and Titus 3. He is an encourager:

**v. 8 — I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.**

As we look through these remarks, there are aspects of godly character that displayed in different people. The obvious application point for us come from this trio of grace in this brother's life: He is faithful as a minister, he is giving his life to serve the Lord, and he is an encourager. May God produce such a trio of grace and faithfulness and encouragement in our own lives. Pray for the godly character displayed in Tychicus's life to be displayed in each of ours. How we need God-centered encouragement in our day!

## Onesimus

He is being sent back to Colossae from Ephesus. He was converted under Paul's ministry, probably in day-in, day-out work of the Gospel in the Hall of Tyrannus. As we heard from Steve last week, he was a runaway slave from Philemon, who was a believer in the church in Colossae. In God's sovereignty, in his run from Colossae, he ran into the grace of the Lord Jesus and was gloriously converted to Christ through the Apostle's ministry. Paul now sends him back to Colossae, but as a brother, not just a slave. His story of redemption is one that dramatically pictures the reconciling work of Christ in his body, the Church. You will recall in chapter 3 Paul wrote these words that totally up-ended the culture's oppressive structure:

**<sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.**

Onesimus was first reconciled to God when he was delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son. Jesus, who reconciles all things to himself, now reconciles this damaged, fractured relationship, elevating not only Onesimus as an adopted child of the King, but also maturing Philemon and calling him to greater responsibility and service to the church by refreshing the soul of this slave, now a brother. There is no longer slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all. This is the theme of Colossians, that Christ is supreme. In him is the fullness of God, and he reconciles us to God by the blood of his cross. Onesimus and his restored relationship with Philemon picture the beauty of reconciliation in the body of Christ.

**Aristarchus** is mentioned as serving with Paul in Ephesus and surviving the riot against the Apostle in Acts 19. Here he is mentioned as being with Paul in prison, either actually imprisoned, or Paul referring to him as a prisoner of the Lord. In which ever case, we see his friendship, loyalty, and brotherhood with Paul is such that he is there side by side, even in the extreme difficulty of prison.

### **Mark, the cousin of Barnabas**

I want to take a little closer look at Mark, also known as John Mark. If we know our history, what we read here is enough to bring tears to our eyes and cause us to worship. Let's delight in what is happening here.

John Mark as a young man had initially set out with Paul and Barnabas as one of their assistants on the first missionary journey, probably 10 or 12 years or so prior to the writing of this letter. Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church in Acts 13 on Paul's first missionary journey. John Mark joined them as an assistant, or intern of sorts, as they struck out. The first place they went was Cyprus, which was a bit of a resort area of the day. It was a very nice place to visit. But as the mission progressed, they moved from a resort island to rugged mountains, difficult terrain, and dangerous travel. At some point, Mark decided it was more than he bargained for, and he chickened out and left the 2 missionaries.

Fast forward to Paul's second missionary journey. **Acts 15:36–40a — <sup>36</sup> And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the**

word of the Lord, and see how they are.”<sup>37</sup> Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.<sup>38</sup> But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.<sup>39</sup> And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,<sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed...

Paul didn't want the turncoat Mark with him, and it caused such a rift that he and Barnabas parted ways. Barnabas, whose nickname is the Son of Encouragement, is seeking to disciple and rehabilitate Mark after his washout. But Paul says, nope, once and done. So we see that godly men who seek to faithfully serve God can disagree. And we also that the great Apostle Paul has feet of clay. He isn't perfect.

All my heroes have clay feet. And I do, too. We are all sinners, and there is only one that's perfect: that's Jesus. If that were the end of the story, it would be an adequate reminder that men fail and can get it wrong, yet God's work continues. But it's not the end of the story, because God intervenes to heal and restore, as he has most notably done through his son Jesus.

Mark at some point spends time with Peter, who himself knows a thing or two about being a turncoat. In 1 Peter 5, Peter describes John Mark in tender terms as his son. So a 3-time denier of Christ, who then experiences God's grace and forgiveness, disciples and shepherds a young man who becomes the author of the Gospel of Mark. Most scholars believe that Mark's gospel is the written record of Peter's account of Jesus' earthly ministry. Do you see the tender sweetness of grace in Colossians 4:10, when Mark is back with Paul in Ephesus. The relationship is healed. Grace triumphs. The failures of the past are forgiven, and usefulness in Kingdom service is restored. There was a time of learning. There was repentance. And now there is restoration.

This still isn't the end of the story. Get your tissues handy. Let's quickly look at the end of Paul's life in his second imprisonment. Paul's time is nearing an end; his likely execution is looming in the not-to-distant future. In Acts 15, Paul's perspective of Mark is that isn't fit for ministry after a bad stumble out of the gate. Now look at what he writes to Timothy, in **2 Timothy 4:11** — <sup>11</sup> **Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.**

Do you see the reconciling power of the cross of Christ? First to God, that Paul, a former persecutor of the church, and essentially a murderer, is reconciled to God and put on mission to see the world come to Christ... and then the reconciling power of the Gospel that takes to sinful men and makes them one, giving them sweet friendship and communion with each other.

Never underestimate the power of the cross. It makes children of wrath children of God. Because of the finished work of Christ in paying for sin and conquering death, his atoning work will change you from being a child of wrath, chained in darkness and sin, and make you a child of the living God, forgiven, and brought into fellowship with God. Come to him in faith... turn from trying to improve yourself. You can't. Look away from yourself to Christ and believe him as he presents himself: The Savior of the World.

Moving quickly now... **Jesus, who is called Justus**. He is not mentioned anywhere else. We just know he's there. "That's it? He just there?" Yes, that would be the point. He's there. He doesn't appear to be a pastor or a leader, but he's just there. He's there in the prayer meeting. He's there for set up. He's there to take the trash out. He's there when his group meets. He's there when they prayer walk. He's there to vacuum. He's there to serve in the nursery — you know we are about to have to start our nursery... He's there to set up the flag pole. He's there to straighten out the shed. Justus is just there. Do we need Justus? Oh, we need a thousand Justuses! You may have thought that since you weren't a pastor, there wasn't much in the sermon for you. But the great Apostle took notice of Justus and his quiet behind-the-scenes faithfulness, and as we said earlier, Paul knows how we need each other. God's work is bigger than any of us. The faithfulness of Justus to be there is written forever in God's word, and reminds us of the importance of our faithful work in being there. Let's think and serve like Justus.

**Epaphras, in v. 12**, is likely the church planter in Colossae. We looked at him in the opening paragraphs of this letter, and Paul reminds us again of one of the most significant marks of Epaphras life: He made war in prayer. He fought spiritual battles for the Colossians because he loved them dearly. Look at what Paul says: 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.

If we had time we would be reminded that love of the brothers and sisters produces prayer for the brothers and sisters. And see the insight and understanding that he has of what really matters in the long run: that you may stand mature and fully assured in the will of God... in the knowledge of your salvation. A quick application point for us in prayer: Who is standing more mature, and more confident in their hope in Christ because of your praying? Let's learn to love and pray like Epaphras!

**Luke** is with Paul there in Ephesus, and **Demas**. Let's quickly look at Demas and make a comparison to John Mark. What we see is that Christianity is not about an exciting start, but a glorious finish. The life of a believer is not a sprint, but a marathon. There are stumbles. There are falls. But for those who have been given a new heart, who are born again, there is always the Holy Spirit to draw us back and restore, as we saw in the life of John Mark.

**Demas** is mentioned here, as an assistant to Paul, and he is mentioned in a similar role at the close of Philemon. Demas is busy doing religious work with Paul, and it looks good from the outside. These words from 1 Samuel 16:7 give us understanding about what is happening here — man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Our behavior is not our problem. The heart is our problem. The need of a new heart is repeated over and over in both Old and New Testaments. The new heart Christ gives changes what we love, it changes our affections. Demas' unconverted heart is eventually exposed in 2 Timothy 4:9–10 — (*Paul writing*) <sup>9</sup> Do your best to come to me soon. <sup>10</sup> For Demas, **in love with this present world**, has deserted me..."

Not even working with the Apostle himself, laboring as a missionary, serving churches... none of those things has the capacity to give a new heart, and we are reminded through Demas that we can't work our way into anything that changes us. We must simply turn to Christ in faith and receive from him a new heart. Christianity is not about an exuberant start, but a transformed heart that over time, produces the fruit of Christ-likeness and holiness, which proves that one is a believer. Give your life to Christ. Receive a new heart, delight in a lifetime of service and love, though you stumble from time to time.

Nympha we already mentioned, and the letter is a circular letter — it is to be circulated to all the church and read when they gather. Now the final point...

### III. Prod to Faithfulness

Maybe prod isn't as positive a word as exhort, urge, but it starts with a "p". Of course a prod is a rod or stick, perhaps electrified or a bit pointy, used to poke cattle to get them moving in the right direction. Paul prods **Archippus**, who is a spiritual leader in Colossae, perhaps a pastor or teacher — we don't know for sure. We simply know he has a God-given assignment, and he is slacking in it.

**v. 17 — say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."**

Hey, Pastor Arch... looks like Ima have to call you out, bro. Be diligent to fully execute the ministry the Lord assigned you. Don't be half-hearted or distracted in what God has given you to do. Don't leave things undone. Pay attention to detail. Hustle to show yourself as a workman. The language does not suggest that Archippus is a total slacker in ministry, but that he isn't working at it with diligence. There is a "pay attention, focus" aspect to Paul's prod.

A reminder for ministers: The 2 paragraphs that end Colossians 1 and begin Colossians 2 remind us that Gospel ministry is costly, and even exhausting. Baked into ministry is:

- an agonizing struggle in prayer and spiritual warfare to advance God's Kingdom and protect God's people. Both Paul and Epaphras were agonizing in prayer for the Colossians.
- There is intellectual rigor, with endless studying, learning, and mental discipline.
- Physical work. Long hours are part of the job;
- There is potential for abuse, persecution, privation;
- There is relentless relational work, engaging with God's people to help them grow spiritually, and embrace and love each other.

Ministry is not a profession. It requires setting aside some "good things" in order to pursue and gain superlative eternal things. "Archippus, let's refocus and remember the high privilege you've been given by God. Get on with the assignment. Give yourself to it. Give it your all. Be faithful. Make it your priority. Nothing else you do will have the eternal value of serving the Lord this way."

With this in mind, would you be diligent to pray for your pastors? Pray that we be faithful to fully complete what God has assigned us. We love you, and it is delight, not duty to serve as pastors. But it is demanding — even in a small church — and we are to be diligent in it. I know you do pray. Redouble your efforts. I am helped and strengthened through prayers.



**What was Archippus's distraction?** Was he a gamer? Was there some hobby he prioritized over his assignment? Was he undisciplined, or a lazy clock watcher? "Is it 5 yet? I'm putting in my 40 hours of ministry this week, then I'm off until next week." Maybe he was ADHD, or perhaps life had thrown a curve ball that was distracting, or there was pandemic. Maybe the wrong guy was elected as president. We don't know the specific problem. But we know something had taken priority over doing God's work in God's way. And while he slinked along, those under his ministry were moving closer to the day judgment.

Beloved, our community is closer to the day of judgment than when we began 3 years ago.

You may not have received Archippus's call to ministry, but all of us stand under the life-consuming commands to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; to declare his glory; to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; to set our minds on things above where Christ is... and all of us are under the authority of Christ, who created all things for himself, and has authority over all things in heaven and earth, and accountable to the imperative "Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that he has commanded."

Let's do something together. Plug your name in to v. 17 and let's feel a motivating prod to faithfulness. Let's be diligent and focused, prioritizing what we are here to do: to love and glorify God, to make him known, and make disciples. And let's gently, sweetly, lovingly prod each other.

**Hebrews 3:12-15 — <sup>12</sup>Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.<sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup>As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

Now, it would be easy, if we aren't thinking with good theology, to hear what *isn't* being said. Paul isn't urging Archippus or anyone to do something in their own strength. This is the Apostle who knows the triumph of God's grace over his own bondage to sin; who knows resurrection power working in him. To be sure we don't misunderstand, his final remark in this letter, written from prison, is a reminder that our greatest need, and our sweetest resource is God's grace.

**v. 18** — I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Grace be with you. You're gonna need God's grace, Archippus, to get cleaned up and refocused. John Mark knows how grace heals and restores. Nympha is a picture of grace to the church meeting in her home. The work of the Lord in calling you and saving you is all a work of grace, Colossians. And you need his grace to **continue** to serve him and advance his Kingdom in the Lycus valley and throughout the world. **You** must be drinking deeply of his grace, Redeemer's Grace Church, if you are to love each other, to be focused, to be on mission globally, and to be salt and light in a dark world that despises the things of God, and will despise you.

All is by his grace in forgiveness, in cleansing, in empowering, and in carrying us home. We know God's grace through the mystery now revealed, that Christ, the hope of glory, is in you, and you are in him, by grace through faith. God's grace freely flows to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Grace be with you.

PRAY