

Good morning, Church! My name is Trent Houck, and I am one of the Pastors here at FCBC. We are closing out our series on the book of Colossians with this 18th sermon on the book. Over the past weeks, we have heard the Gospel preached through: Steve Walker, Ryan Patterson, Billy Mogensen, Dave Gibson, David O'Hara, Javier Sepulveda/Ben Tyson, Josiah Gerbitz, and Benj Foreman. We have been meditating on the truth of God's word that:

1. Jesus is enough (Col. 1:1-8)
2. Jesus is the one we run to in prayer (Col. 1:9-14)
3. Jesus is enough because he is preeminent (Col. 1:15-20)
4. Jesus' sufficiency saves us from our insufficiency (Col. 1:21-23)
5. Jesus' presence in us is the hope of glory! (Col. 1:24-29)
6. Jesus is our treasure of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:1-5)
7. We receive Christ, and walk in him (Col. 2:6-7)
8. Jesus is captivating (Col. 2:8-15)
9. Jesus is the substance and fullness of God (Col. 2:16-19)
10. Man-made rules keep us from Christ (Col. 2:20-23)
11. Jesus is a worthy object for our new minds (Col. 3:1-4)
12. Christians slay sin because Jesus is enough (Col. 3:5-11)
13. Christian Community is defined by love (Col. 3:12-17)
14. The Gospel determines family order (Col. 3:18-22)
15. Christ's Kingdom is worth working for (Col. 3:23-4:1)
16. Christians preach the Gospel! (Col. 4:2-5)
17. Christians are saved to preach the Gospel prayerfully, wisely, and graciously (Col. 4:2-6)
18. Finally: The Gospel saves us into true friendships (Col. 4:7-18)

All of this is to highlight our central theme: Rooted in Christ

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, **7** rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

But, what does all this actually look like? It would be so easy for all of us to walk away from Colossians with better theology, more insight, and deeper interest in the person and work of Christ and to miss the connection to real people in real places.

The final section of Colossians means to show us that the Gospel saves us into true friendship. That is to say, that when you have been reconciled to God, that necessarily means that you are in right standing with your brothers and sisters in Jesus. In other words, when you come to Christ, when you become a friend of God, you inherit all of Jesus' friends also.

So, I would like to begin this section by illustration. I need 10 volunteers. (Count them out). Once I call you out, come on up and sit in a seat on the stage.

Each of you will represent one of the people mentioned in Colossians 4:7-18.

Let's hear God's word.

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.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, (1)

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. (2) (**Ask Tychicus and Onesimus to go sit down**)

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, (3)

and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), (4) (**Ask this group to stay**)

11 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. (5) (**Stay**)

12 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. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. (6) (**Ask Epaphras to get into a prayer posture**)

14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, (7)

as does Demas. (8) (**Ask to wave and look dignified**)

15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, (Left Side of the Sanctuary) (**Ask congregation to say: "Greetings!"**)

and to Nympha and the church in her house. (9) (**Ask the congregation on the left side to say: "Hi Nympha!"**)

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. (**Ask the congregation to say: "You got it, Paul!"**)

17 And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” (10) (**Ask the Congregation to say: "We'll tell him!"**)

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. (Self) (**Ask the congregation to celebrate volunteers and the close of the letter**).

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we come before your word now in order to allow you to speak to our hearts. We recognize that this too is your word. In your sovereign plan, you chose to use these men and women to advance your Gospel. Help us to catch a vision of what this would look like for our own lives.

Jesus, we praise you for your perfect life. The Father sent you, and you went for the joy set before, even enduring the cross. We thank you for your atoning death, for drinking the cup of God's wrath against sin, so that we might have friendship with God and fellowship with one another. Thank you for your resurrection, for the fact that you are now seated at the right hand of the throne in heaven, making intercession for us, even as we gather before you.

Holy Spirit, give us a vision for Gospel-friendships and Gospel-partnerships here at FCBC. Give us the boldness, courage, and desire to lay down our lives for others, to trust each other, and to grow in maturity to the stature and fullness of Christ. We pray these things for the glory of God in Jesus' name, amen.

The Gospel saves us into true friendship.

You don't have to look past the first verse in Colossians to see that Paul was a man who loved friendship. He writes in Colossians 1:1-2, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae..." Timothy was one of Paul's closest friends. Paul writes of Timothy in Philippians 2:20, "...I have no one like him [Timothy], who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare" and "...you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:22). Paul almost never worked alone, and when it came to writing his books, he gave credit to the co-author, Timothy. That's true friendship.

Do you have these kinds of friends? Even a best friend?

In many ways, the entire letter to the Colossians was an expression of friendship. We rarely write letters today, but the communication between Paul and Colossae was dripping with familial affection and love. Since Paul has come to know Epaphras, he has come to love him. And, a friend of Epaphras (who planted the church in Colossae, and wanted to plant more in the Lycus Valley) is a friend of Paul's. Paul loved to surround himself with friends. One author writes, "In the book of Acts there are more than 100 different Christians associated with Paul. He

named sixteen different friends in Romans 16 alone! Here in Colossians he was true to form as he named ten people in closing.”

Why do you think that Paul had so many friends?

Paul had friends because friendship is intrinsic to the Gospel. It's like pizza with cheese. You can't have pizza without the cheese. (I suppose, some of you can). Paul writes, "He has delivered *us* from the domain of darkness and transferred *us* to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom *we* have redemption the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). You can't have the Gospel without the "us". That is, Jesus' decisive saving work in the life of the believer places you in a new kingdom. And, a friend of Jesus is a friend of mine, Paul says. In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that these relationships are brother/sister relationships. Because of Jesus' finished work, we are now family.

Now, these new brothers and sisters are not *only* people who destroy your Lego sets, leave their clothes out in your room, and savagely beat you at Monopoly. These are the kinds of brothers and sisters who get you presents at Christmas, help you with the dishes, and are people you'd like to emulate.

So, here is the main question for us this morning: are we *actively* engaging with these kinds of friendships here at FCBC? Are you a good friend?

Paul has already detailed for us that *sin* breaks friendships down in a few ways. He writes, "Here [that is, in the household of God] there is not Greek and Jew [that is, friendship on the basis of racial or ethnic background], circumcised and uncircumcised [that is, friend lines because of religious background], barbarian [that is, friend lines on the basis of social status], Scythian [geography or obscurity], slave [economic status], free [citizenry]; but Christ is all [that is, what matters most] and in all [that is, in all kinds of people]" (Col. 3:11). Paul says, "none of these things need to divide you."

However, because we live in a fallen world, left to ourselves *we do divide over all kinds of things*. We feel alienated by people who are different than us, and we sometimes actively or accidentally alienate those who would otherwise befriend us. This happens within our church even as it happens in our world. People want to form groups around age, gender, married, single, kids, no kids, hobbies, school choice, background, and the like. We naturally drift toward people who are just like us.

Raise your hand if you have ever felt lonely. Have you ever wondered why? What's the solution to this sin problem? The answer is the Gospel. The Gospel saves us into true friendships.

Here's what this means. The Gospel saves us into at least six kinds of friendships. We need all the types. And we need to learn to become all of them as well.

This is the good news: when we become friends with Jesus through his death, burial, and resurrection, we have a friend who will never leave us or forsake us, and Jesus brings you into friendship with his best friends.

The Gospel saves us into:

- 1. Commissioned Friendships (Colossians 4:7-9).**
 1. These are friends we purposefully give away to others.
- 2. Comfort Friendships (Colossians 4:10-11).**
 1. These are longtime childhood friends.
- 3. Commended Friendships (Colossians 4:12-13).**
 1. These are respected friends that we look up.
- 4. Church Friendships (Colossians 4:15-16).**
 1. These are friends that we'd only make because of the Gospel.
- 5. Collapsing Friendships (Colossians 4:17).**
 1. These are friends who need support, struggling friends.
- 6. Current Friendships (Colossians 4:18).**
 1. New Friends.

First, the Gospel saves us into commissioned friendships. We read,

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.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,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.

Tychicus and Onesimus are commissioned friends. Tychicus was a loyal friend. He was faithful. He was with Paul when Paul went through really hard times. Paul wrote:

"I was shipwrecked, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Corinthians 11:25-27).

Tychicus was there for all that.

Many left Paul behind, but Tychicus stuck by him. As the Colossian letter is being written in Rome, someone had to volunteer to take it back.

Paul was probably scratching his chin, wondering: who should I send to take this back to the Colossians?

Tychicus had internalized this beautiful passage from Romans, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed, Tychicus? And how are they to believe in him in whom they have never heard, Tychicus? And how are they to hear without someone preaching, Tychicus? And how are they to preach unless they are sent, Tychicus? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" (Romans 10:14-16).

As the final pen strokes of Colossians are being laid, I imagine that Paul is asking: Who will go for us? Tychicus steps forward. "Send me, I'll go." More than likely, tears filled Paul's eyes, realizing what he was asking. "Yes, Tychicus, you will go, but not without Onesimus."

Onesimus looked up surprised. "Me?"

Onesimus is a runaway slave. Paul says, "Yes you, Onesimus. I have a letter for your master Philemon that you will carry as well." Tears fill Onesimus's eyes for other reasons. "Remember, Onesimus, 'Here in the body of Christ there is no...'

"Slave or Free." Onesimus says. "Okay, Paul. I will go."

Onesimus was being commissioned to apply the Gospel to a broken friendship and partnership with Philemon. And Onesimus was being sent to repair the breach because, "If two believers cannot be reconciled, then either both or one is not in fellowship with God."

Tychicus went to deliver the letter. Onesimus went as the embodiment of the message.

Gospel proclamation necessarily means this kind of Gospel friendship.

These two depart on their 1000 mile journey to the Colossians with their letters in hand, and one more (likely Ephesians).

Do you have friends like that? If you know Jesus, you have a friend who was sent to deliver you a message. If you know Jesus, you know someone like Onesimus too: Jesus was the message (John 1).

Paul has friends that he is willing to commission so that the Gospel advances in the world. He trusts them. He leans on them. He sends them.

Paul sends Tychicus and Onesimus. Paul has commissioned friends.

But, doesn't that leave Paul lonely?

That leads us to our next point:

Second, the Gospel saves us into friendships that bring us comfort. When we lose friends, it's really important that we are not left alone. So, God provides other kinds of friends.

Paul writes,

10 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), 11 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

So, Paul has three Jewish friends. These are friends who share heritage, upbringing, native language, and new life in Jesus. If you have been in foreign area for any length of time, you begin to hunger and thirst for your native language, culture, and norms.

God graciously provides these three men to:

- a. Be in prison with him (Aristarchus)
- b. Be reconciled to him (Mark)
- c. Be with him (Jesus).

Now, Paul highlights these men for a few different reasons:

1. **The Colossians care about Paul!** They want to know how he is doing. They want to know that he's alive, and how God is providing for him. They desire to pray for him and help him in any way they can. They are not indifferent to him.
2. **The Colossians wondered about Mark.** If the Colossians are aware of Mark's departure from Paul in Acts 16, they'll need to know that things are good between them now. As you remember, there was a point when Mark bailed on Paul, and it hurt him pretty badly! But, Paul wants them to know that they are in good hands if Mark comes their way. They've reconciled.
3. **The Colossians needed to know who was safe.** We don't know almost anything about Jesus called Justus. But, I think that Paul mentions him here so that if the Colossians have developed an apprehension to Jewish teachers because of the Colossian heresy, they would know that Jesus called Justus comes recommended by Paul.

These are *comfort*, safe friends. They are people who continually encourage Paul's heart because they get him. These are friends with whom Paul would share inside jokes from his culture. They would know his native language. They would be able to speak in a unique way to the matters of his heart.

But, doesn't Paul also need to be *challenged*?

This leads us to our third point:

Third, the Gospel saves us into commended friendships. These are friendships with people that we look up to in the faith, or at least those who are peers with us. Even Paul needed to see examples of faith. He needed to be encouraged by church planters and missionaries. He needed to be reminded of the Gospel.

He writes,

12 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. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

This is quite a commendation! "Praise from the praiseworthy is above all rewards." To have the hard-working, prayerful Paul say: "That guy is hard-working! That guy is prayerful!" is a deep commendation of Epaphras' spiritual fitness.

This was encouraging to Paul. Paul didn't *always* have good days. There were times that Paul was really lonely, scared, fearful, and depressed, just like we would be if we were in his situation. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9,

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

There were also times when Paul was anxious:

28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (2 Corinthians 11:28)

Epaphras reminded Paul of why he was doing what he was doing. Epaphras was a church-planter, a missionary. Paul's own life was reflected in Epaphras. And, Jesus' life was reflected in both. So, Paul commends three things about Epaphras:

1. **His prayer life.** Epaphras prays often "...always struggling on your behalf..." He prays specifically "...that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God."
2. **His work ethic.** "He has worked hard for you." Epaphras is not in this for self-glory, but for Gospel advancement. He hits his knees, preaches, teaches, and leads for the sake of the Gospel. This impresses Paul.
3. **His vision.** And if that isn't enough, Epaphras wants to see the Gospel advance. He has a heart "For those in Laodicea and Hierapolis." He's not concerned only for his hometown, but for the surrounding cities.

Paul mentions two more friends:

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

You can read about Luke all throughout the book of Acts. He is the Author of Luke and Acts, and he is a key player in the Gospel advancing. He is the "beloved healer", probably extremely bright, intellectual, and competent.

We don't know a ton about Demas. At the moment of the writing of Colossians, he is "a fellow worker with Paul." Maybe that's all we need to know! Nonetheless, Paul needed commendable friends. Even so, Paul needs friends who will move the Gospel work forward.

That leads us to our next point.

Fourth, God saves us into Church friendships. These are friendships that develop around the mission of Christ, and that continue in the mission of Christ.

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

Paul expected that the Colossians would pass along the things that he had said to the Laodiceans and to the Church in Nympha's house. Further, he expected that his letters would be read all over the Lycus Valley. The "letter from Laodicea" is probably Ephesians.

This means that his communication was intended to be read more broadly.

Because the greetings spanned out across the Lycus Valley, we can also say, in a very indirect way, that Paul greets us from the first century through the letter to the Colossians. Pretty cool!



Here is the key point: when you have deep, Gospel friendships, the relationships expand much further than just the individual. The Gospel brings you into a sort of web of friendships. Whatever you do in one friendship affects all the rest. We can see this very clearly with Paul, but we usually don't consider the ways that we are at center-points of our web of friendships.

The Christian is called to have Jesus at the center of all of his or her friendships, and that necessarily connects you to the rest of the body of Christ.

That leads to our fifth point.

Fifth, and briefly, Collapsing friends. These are people who are struggling in Christian ministry and are very tempted to give up. We are not to see these people as projects or as lost causes, but to follow Paul's examples in the following way:

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

Maybe Archippus was just beginning in ministry (Phil. 1:2), or maybe there was a particular issue that was leading him to feel like he couldn't fulfill his ministry. Either way, Paul singled out this man and called the Colossian Church to reaffirm their desire for him to fulfill his ministry.



Paul, at the end of his own life says this in 2 Timothy 4:

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Paul knows that it is not how a minister starts his ministry that really matters, but how one finishes. All along the way, there will be people in your life who will struggle to finish well. We are called to encourage them.

That leads us to our final point.

Sixth, and finally, Paul affirms his friendships with the Colossians.

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

Paul knows that his personal voice matters to the Colossians. He pulls back the curtain and says something to help the Colossians feel, know and believe that Paul is for them because God is for them.

A few questions to ask as application:

- a. What kinds of friends do you need? (Ask God for this)
- b. What kind of friend are you? (Ask your friends about this)
- c. What kinds of friends have you had in the past? (Praise God for this!)
- d. What kind of friend will you be in the future? (Ask God about this)
- e. What do I appreciate most about God's friendship? (Praise God for this!)

So ends the book of Colossians. We are going to transition now into two things.

1. **Testimony:** We are going to show a short recap of testimonies from people who have been encouraged by the message of Colossians. Then,
2. **Baptism:** We are going to see a baptism together. Water baptism, intended for true believers who have been saved by the work of Christ, is an act of obedience and a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that the power of sin is broken, vividly depicting a believer's newness of life. Key Texts: Mt 28:19-20; Acts 2:41; 8:34-39; Rom 6:3-11. The person being baptized will share their testimony, be baptized and then we will celebrate the end of this series with one final song of worship.

Let's join together in celebrating what God has done here at FCBC in the past 3-4 months.