

Colossians
The Team
Colossians 4:7-18

January 8, 2023

HDBC

Well, it's time for Paul to bring this letter to a close. He has dealt with doctrinal issues, as well as practical applications. Now at the close of the letter, this hero of the faith offers a list of some of the important people who served with him. Paul recognized that he could not do it alone. He was a part of a larger team. Though most of those listed at the close of this letter are not well-known names to us, they were important members of the early church.

Before Paul was saved, he was a part of a **team legalism**. His teammates were Pharisees who delighted in forcing people to abide by a rigid list of do's & don'ts. They made life miserable for others. But on the road to Damascus, Paul was delivered from legalism, and born again. That day he joined **team grace**.

Rather than keeping people in bondage, this team worked to set people free in Jesus. Though he would ultimately become a primary leader of the grace team, Paul never once thought of going it alone. He knew that the team was bigger than any one person. Proverbs 27:17 says, *as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*.

Eccl. 4:9-12 says, *two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart*.

1. The Messengers (7-9)

Two men were sent by Paul, bringing this letter to the Colossians. When they arrived, they would fill the Colossians in on Paul's condition. Notice who these men were.

A. Tychicus

Paul uses three nouns, each with an adjective to describe this man.

1) Beloved Brother

First, he was a brother in Christ, a fellow believer. Paul did not put people onto some hierarchy of importance. All believers were brothers and sisters. Paul did not see himself as being above the others. Tychicus had been willing to stay in Rome with Paul during his imprisonment. That is brother-like love.

2) Faithful Minister

Faithful may be one of the highest compliments that can be given to a person. Here was a person upon whom Paul could depend. Alexander McClaren wrote, “his business was to run Paul’s errands, and like a true man, he ran them faithfully.

For possibly ten years he served as an assistant to Paul. Now once more he is entrusted with an important task, taking this letter to the Colossians. It was not an easy journey from Rome to Colossae, but Tychicus was willing to make the trip.

3) Fellow Servant

Word for servant is *diakonos*. We get our word *deacon* from this word. A servant is one who works for the good of others. Notice that this is what he was doing on this mission. Sent to encourage their hearts.

B. Onesimus

Onesimus was a runaway slave who had gotten saved. Interesting to notice the way Paul describes this man. He uses almost the same language as for Tychicus. *Faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number*. He is one of us.

He had belonged to Philemon, his master. He ran away to Rome. While in Rome met Paul and was led to faith in Christ. We are not given the circumstances under which this happened. Only that it did.

His name means “**useful**” or “**profitable**.” He eventually lived up to his name by becoming useful to the apostle. When Paul wrote that Onesimus was *one of them* he was making it clear that Onesimus was no longer to be considered a thing to be owned, but a fellow brother in Christ.

Paul also sent a personal letter with Onesimus to Philemon, his master. Under Roman law Philemon had unlimited authority. He could do with Onesimus as he wished. He could have been tortured or killed. Often recovered runaway slaves were branded on the forehead & condemned to double labor. Sometimes they were torn apart by animals. Paul appealed to Philemon to accept Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother in Christ.

2. The Greeters (10-14)

These were in Rome with Paul and who wanted to send along their greeting to the fellow believers in Colossae. Six names are included.

A. Aristarchus (10)

Was with Paul in Ephesus. He was with Paul on his voyage to Rome. He was a *fellow prisoner* – Which means he spent time with Paul in Rome. He knew something of the suffering and loneliness that Paul was experiencing. Clearly this man was one who stood with Paul. Church tradition has it that he was put to death in Rome by Nero.

B. Mark (10)

Mark was a relative of Barnabas. Most of what we know of Mark comes from Luke's writings in Acts. We see him come onto the scene in Acts 12:12 where he volunteers to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary expedition from Antioch.

One chapter later in Acts 13:13 we read that Mark departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. When the going got rough, Mark collapsed under the pressure. He abandoned the team, quit the tour. The reason for his return to Jerusalem is not known. There are a number of possibilities. But we know that his departure left a bad taste in the mouth of Paul. When he and Barnabas talked about a return mission tour, Barnabas wanted to take Mark, and Paul strongly refused. It caused such a disagreement with Paul that they separated.

Now ten or so years later, he is back on the scene with Paul and is good standing. He has proven himself worthy, and Paul's words reflect this. In Philemon, Paul refers to him as a *fellow servant*. Mark is evidence that God is a God of second chances. **If you've failed, remember Mark.**

C. Jesus (Justus) (11)

Here is a man with an interesting name. This is all we know about him. He was named Jesus, which was a somewhat common name, so Paul mentions his other name to make sure his readers knew which one. Jesus Christ took a common name and exalted it. In the same way he takes common people and exalts them.

There is an interesting phrase at the end of verse 11. These are the only fellow workers who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to Paul. Jewish believers with Paul. Many of the Jews not only resisted conversion but fought hard against it. And others who were saved, struggled with the absolute nature of grace.

That word *encouragement* is a great word. It has the idea of bringing relief. Could refer to a tonic. Isn't it great to have believers around you who are encouragers to you.

D. Epaphras (12)

He was from Colossae. Some suggest that he may have even been the pastor of that church who was separated from them at this time. Listen again to Paul's description of him. Read 12-13.

Sure sounds like a pastor type. He was clearly a prayer warrior. He labored for them in his prayers. This word pictures intense athletic activity. It is the word from which we get our word *agony*.

E. Luke (14)

This is the beloved physician. He was the traveling companion of Paul, as well as the author of two New Testament books. Some tradition says that Luke was not only a doctor, but an artist. Paul and Luke must have been good friends. They had much in common. Both highly educated men. Now they are joined together in the cause of the Gospel.

F. Demas (14)

Nothing else is said about him in this text. But there are other references later. By the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy something had happened to Demas. He had deserted the faith.

Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. **Demas** is a reminder of the need to stay true to the end. To daily die to self and to stay committed to the Kingdom.

3. **The Others** (15-18)

Paul then encourages the readers of the letter to greet the believers in Laodicea. And he mentions two other people by name.

A. Nympha

Whoever this person was, there was a church meeting in her house. She is one of those obscure persons whose name we know, but very little else. But she had opened his home to allow the believers to meet there.

B. Archippus

Paul then has a personal word for Archippus. He encouraged him to make sure that he focused on the ministry that God had called him to in order that he might fulfill it. Paul knew that it was easy to get distracted away from God's plan for a person's life. He is mentioned in the letter to Philemon. There Paul calls him a fellow soldier.

Never underestimate the importance of TEAMWORK

There's a wonderful story about Jimmy Durante, one of the great entertainers of a generation ago. He was asked to be a part of a show for World War II veterans. He told them his schedule was very busy and he could afford only a few minutes, but if they wouldn't mind his doing one short monologue and immediately leaving for his next appointment, he would come.

Of course, the show's director agreed happily. But when Jimmy got on stage, something interesting happened. He went through the short monologue and then stayed. The applause grew louder and louder and he kept staying. Pretty soon, he had been on fifteen, twenty, then thirty minutes. Finally, he took a last bow and left the stage. Backstage someone stopped him and said, "I thought you had to go after a few minutes. What happened?"

Jimmy answered, "I did have to go, but I can show you the reason I stayed. You can see for yourself if you'll look down on the front row." In the front row were two men, each of whom had lost an arm in the war. One had lost his right arm

and the other had lost his left. Together, they were able to clap, and that's exactly what they were doing, loudly and cheerfully.

We are a team. Each player is important. That includes you!

I get that some of us are more introverted than others. Some are comfortable around large groups and others not so much. Some of you may feel that the best thing for you would be to become a hermit and close yourself off from all other human interaction. This would be a grave mistake, for it would be a deniable of the very way God made us. We were made for fellowship, for companionship, to be **part of a team**.

John Eldridge wrote the following:

When he left Rivendell, Frodo didn't head out with 1,000 Elves. He had eight companions.

Jesus didn't march around backed by hundreds of followers, either. He had 12 men—knuckleheads, every last one of them, but they were a band of brothers.

This is the way of the kingdom of God. Though we are part of a great company, we are meant to live in **little platoons**.

Don't cut yourself off from others.

Get connected. Get reconnected. Stay connected.