

Series: Colossians

Title: Are There Any Among Us? Part 3

Text: Colossians 4:14-17

Date: April 28, 2024

Verse 14

In verse 14, Paul mentioned two names: “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas” (Colossians 4:14). The Luke in our verse was none other than the man who wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Paul mentioned him elsewhere by name in his writings (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). In 2 Timothy 4:11, we discover that he was the only one with Paul in the apostle’s last days. As Paul faced death, Luke proved to be a faithful friend, staying by his side and not fearful of the threat of death that might have come through association with a “criminal” like Paul.

Interestingly, Paul had two of the gospel writers (Mark and Luke) with him as he wrote the letter to the Colossians. A.T. Robertson has proposed that both Mark and Luke likely had manuscripts of their gospels with them.¹ Perhaps they shared their writings with Paul. Maybe Paul made theological contributions to their writings, based on what he had received via private revelation from the Lord. We can only speculate on these matters.

Luke was a prolific writer. His gospel account gives witness to his attention to detail, his vast historical knowledge, his astute grip on both Jewish and Roman culture, and his solid grasp of the Greek language. The book of Acts gives a robust testimony to such things as well. While John’s writings are often regarded as the writings of a common man, Luke’s writings are often regarded as the writings of an academic. It is interesting to consider the fact that Luke was with Paul as both the letter to the Colossians and 2 Timothy were written. Maybe Luke made some contributions to each of those writings. Perhaps he was the actual penman for Paul since Paul’s physical limitations and shackled hands would have made writing difficult (Colossians 4:18).

It seems Luke stuck close by Paul’s side in order to offer medical assistance. As noted in our verse, Luke was a “physician.” The physical limitations of Paul are well attested to in the New Testament. It is believed that the apostle suffered from a serious eye disease (2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Galatians 4:15; 6:11). Perhaps Luke felt compelled to stay by his side in order to offer medical treatment and physical relief. If so, it is no wonder that Paul used the adjective “beloved” in reference to the man. Together, Paul and Luke shared a beautiful friendship. One was known for caring for the physical bodies of men and women, while the other was known for mending souls. The fellowship of the two provides a hallmark example of the power of Christian communion. The Lord has a way of making all types of people one through the bond of his spirit. He uses the natural temperaments, earthly abilities, and spiritual gifts of a variety of people to build and bless his kingdom.

The mention of a second name in verse 14 — Demas — evokes painful thoughts for those who know the full story of Scripture. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul mentioned the man on a second occasion. Paul’s second mention, however, sealed the man’s name in Christian infamy. Shortly before being executed, the apostle wrote, “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4:10). From what we can tell, Paul’s persecution and predicament was too much for Demas. Knowing of Paul’s pending execution, the man fled for refuge in the ways of the “world.”

¹ Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume IV, The Epistles of Paul*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 512.

Every believer faces the temptation Demas faced. Christians are in a constant war with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Bible says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The devil uses tried and tested methods to ensnare God’s people. Scripture teaches us that his chief methods are the values of the world. The Bible says, “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:16). As the ruler of this world, Satan aims to ensnare people with an inordinate fascination with pleasure (“the lust of the flesh”), possessions (“the lust of the eye”), and prestige (“the pride of life”).

It is worth noting that Satan used his same three-fold value system in his temptation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-11), the kings of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:16-20), and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). Fortunately, Christ overcame Satan’s tactics; thus, believers have supernatural power for overcoming the values of this world. To avoid becoming casualties like Demas, each believer must count the cost. Each must be wise to the ways of Satan and the world. In addition, each must make a resolute, grace-filled commitment to be like Moses, the one who: “...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Verse 15

Next, Paul sent personal greetings to a specific group of people. He said, “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Colossians 4:15). Scholars debate concerning whether or not Nympha was a man or a woman.² Modern translations often assume the individual was female. Though it is probably best to believe that Nympha was a woman, the gender of the individual is not what’s most important for our consideration. What is important is the service the individual offered. Nympha showed great hospitality to the body of Christ, hosting a church in her home.

During the days of the early church, local congregations often met in homes (Acts 2:2; 5:42). The book of Acts tells of the way the first believers met from “house to house” (Acts 2:46). First-century Jewish communities normally wouldn’t build a synagogue until a quorum requirement had been met (Acts 16:13). The first Christians did not stick to a custom. Whether the number of believers was small or relatively large, they would meet in homes of church members.³ The practice of Christian congregations meeting in homes continues to this day in parts of the world in which the church is smaller. It is believed that Christian congregations did not start meeting in larger, public buildings until the Third Century.⁴

Nympha stood in a long line of faithful women in the early church. Mark 1:29-31 told of the way Peter’s mother-in-law hosted early church gatherings. The book of Acts described how the mother of John Mark — the man mentioned back in verse 10 — was hospitable and hosted prayer meetings in her home (Acts 12:12). Acts told of how one named Lydia used her home to show hospitality to Paul and his ministry counterparts (Acts 16:15). Romans 16:3-5 commended Prisca and Aquilla for opening their home to the church. The service of such women give testimony to the usefulness of the blessing of women in the body of Christ

² Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 470.

³ Wright, N.T. *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*. (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 159.

⁴ Robertson, 512.

(Galatians 3:26-28). It also extols the place of hospitality and service in the church (Romans 12:7; 1 Peter 4:9).

Verse 17

In verse 17, Paul gave a personal instruction to an individual named Archippus. He said, “And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord” (Colossians 4:17). The words “see that you” constituted a command in the original language.⁵ In a modern way of saying things, Paul’s intent was to say, “Keep an eye on your ministry — fulfill it!” Paul gave a similar admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, saying, “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Note the way Paul said Archippus had “received” his ministry “in the Lord. What did Paul mean? Some may take his words to refer to some sort of ecclesiastical bequeathment of priestly office and duties. That is, they may interpret Paul’s words as sanctioning a sort of ecclesiastical class of ministers in which there are varying levels of ranks — priests, bishops, cardinals, and even a pope! In this view, Archippus was sanctioned and ordained for ministry by those with superiority over him in the church.

It seems that it is better to regard Paul’s words as a recognition of the Lord’s leadership in Archippus’ life. When the Lord calls a man to serve in the local church, he does so through a few means. First, he gives a man a supernatural desire to preach and minister. Evidence for this is seen in Paul’s words to Timothy: “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). Second, the Lord equips those he calls with the spiritual gifts required for pastoring and preaching. It is for this reason that Paul said a pastor must “able to teach” and able to “care for God’s church” (1 Timothy 3:2, 5). Third, a called individual must have the blessing and sanctioning of a local congregation. If a man is really equipped for ministry, his local church will recognize God’s calling on his life. Precedent for such a reality is seen in the book of Acts in Luke’s description of Timothy’s call to ministry. In speaking of the way the man was set apart to minister with Paul, Luke said, “Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him...” (Acts 16:1-3).

Putting these things together helps us see the meaning of Paul’s words concerning Archippus. At some point in his spiritual journey, Archippus received a supernatural burden to preach and teach God’s Word. Along with that burden, he and others began to notice that he had some spiritual capabilities for such things. To quote Paul, he was “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). Finally, the church apparently validated God’s call on Archippus’ life. Through such spiritual mechanisms, the man “received” his “ministry in the Lord.”

It is worth noting that another shade of meaning could be found in Paul’s words. In the days of the apostles, ministers and pastors were sometimes directly or indirectly appointed through apostolic leadership. See Titus 1:5 for an example of such a thing. Since they were official representatives of Jesus, apostles had the authority and power to appoint leaders. Now that the twelve apostles are no longer with the church, such appointments no longer take place. We note all of this because one could assume that Paul had some sort of place in appointing Archippus to the ministry. This does not mean that the normal methods and means of God calling man to ministry were circumvented by such an appointment. Archippus would have still had a supernatural desire for preaching (1 Timothy 3:1) and he would have still had the supernatural gifts for preaching (1 Timothy 3:2). However, the appointment of an apostle would have, in effect, validated the man’s ministry. One Greek scholar has commented that the

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 470.

language "...suggests a mediate rather than a direct reception; Archippus received the charge immediately from St Paul, though ultimately from Christ."⁶

Regardless of the exact way in which Epaphras received his ministry, the point of Paul's words in Colossians 4:17 remain. The man had received a ministry from the Lord, and he needed to be faithful to fulfill his ministry. The word rendered "fulfill" in our verse appeared as a present tense verb. As a result, Paul's charge called for a continual action. Commenting on Paul's words, one has said that it is "a lifetime job" for a minister to fulfill his calling.⁷ Another has said the sense of our verse is "that thou keep on filling it full."⁸

Paul's charge has application for every minister of every generation. Those who are called to preach and lead the church should be careful to be "all in" on their calling. They should be vigilant to fully preach, faithfully pray, and diligently lead the church. At all times, they should be on guard against diversions and distractions that would keep them from their calling. Paul's words to Timothy are worth remembering: "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him" (2 Timothy 2:4).

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 470.

⁷ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 470.

⁸ Robertson, 513.