

## **Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (26): Concluding Words**

Lord willing, today we will complete our study of Colossians.

Beginning with 4:7 the apostle identified nine specific persons in his concluding statements in this epistle to the church at Colossae. We may learn from these words additional information regarding the church and also how the apostle and others conducted the work of the ministry. Let us read Colossians 4:7 through 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.

These verses may be organized under the heading of “Paul’s Personal Notes” in this way:

1. Paul’s Messengers (4:7-9)
2. Greetings from Paul’s Companions (4:10-14)
3. Greetings to Various Friends (4:15-17)

Let us consider each of these in turn.

### **I. Paul’s Messengers (4:7-9)**

#### **1. Tychicus**

The first friend of the apostle that is mentioned is Tychicus in verses 7 through 9.

<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.

Paul mentioned this fellow worker elsewhere. Almost the same language is used of him in the last chapter of the epistle to the church at Ephesus.

<sup>21</sup>But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; <sup>22</sup>whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. (Eph. 6:21f)

Tychicus probably was the carrier and deliverer of both the epistles to the churches at Colossae and Ephesus. He may have also delivered an epistle of Paul that he had written to the church at Laodicea (cf. Col. 4:16).<sup>1</sup> This man was a fellow worker of Paul, who knew intimately and personally the nature and details of the apostolic ministry. He would be able to report *accurately* to the church at Colossae (and Ephesus) the news of Paul's ministry and of his imprisonment in Rome. He would also be able to represent Paul *faithfully* to the church, for Tychicus was a capable man in his own right in the work of the gospel ministry, for Paul described him as a "faithful minister" and he could assign him the task to "comfort" their hearts (v. 22). The word translated as "minister" is the Greek word, δίακονος (*diakonos*), which is elsewhere translated (or transliterated) as "deacon." Paul had confidence in Tychicus. He was a capable man, a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

Paul also referenced his friend twice in his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus.

<sup>9</sup>Be diligent to come to me quickly; <sup>10</sup>for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica-- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup>Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. <sup>12</sup>And *Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus*. (2 Tim. 4:9-12)

<sup>12</sup> When I send Artemas to you, or *Tychicus*, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. (Titus 3:12)

We also read of Tychicus in the Book of Acts. Luke was travelling with Paul and wrote of men who were with them.

<sup>2</sup>Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece <sup>3</sup>and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup>And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia-- also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and *Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia*. <sup>5</sup>These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. (Acts 20:2-5)

Here we read that he was from "Asia", which would have been "Asia Minor", which was the western region of what is modern Turkey. This was also, of course, the region in which both Ephesus and Colossae were located.<sup>2</sup> Tychicus was probably converted under Paul's ministry when Paul had served there for a period of two years.

We read of Paul's ministry in Ephesus in Acts 19.

But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:9-10)

I suspect that Tychicus was among these who heard the Word of God "who dwelt in Asia."

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<sup>1</sup> It is a common assertion in biblical studies that our Epistle to the Ephesians was a "circular" letter sent to a number of churches in Asia Minor and is to be identified with this epistle to the Laodiceans mentioned in Colossians 4:16.

<sup>2</sup> Ephesus was on the coast of the Aegean Sea. Laodicea and Colossae were inland about 85 and 100 miles respectively from the coast.

Paul described Tychicus as his “beloved brother.” They served the Lord and the Lord’s people together. There was a companionship, a close affinity with one another in the Lord. Often these are the richest kinds of friendships possible in this fallen world--those who work together for the furtherance of the cause of Jesus Christ.

## 2. Onesimus

With regard to this man, we may read verses 7 through 9 once again:

<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.

Paul regarded Onesimus, as he had Tychicus, as a “faithful and beloved brother.” Paul knew this man and trusted him. Their hearts were knit together. Onesimus’ affection and commitment to the apostle was a tried relationship, for it was while Paul was imprisoned that Onesimus proved himself to be a faithful brother.

We read that Onesimus was one of the members of the church at Colossae. Paul wrote to the church of him, “who is one of you.” Onesimus was a citizen of Colossae, even a member of the household where the church at Colossae most likely met every Lord’s Day. You probably recognize him due to the epistle of Paul that principally speaks of him, *Paul’s Epistle to Philemon*. When Tychicus carried this epistle to the church at Colossae, he also carried with him the personal epistle that Paul had written to Philemon. The subject of this letter was the return of his runaway slave, Onesimus.

Let us read from this letter of Paul. Philemon, verses 10-22, read as follows:

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, <sup>11</sup>who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. <sup>12</sup>I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, <sup>13</sup>whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. <sup>15</sup>For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, <sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup>If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. <sup>18</sup>But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay -- not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. <sup>20</sup>Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. <sup>22</sup>But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Paul wrote this letter at the same time he had written his epistle to the church at Colossae. Although Paul had been bound, his gospel was not bound. His message of salvation through Jesus Christ found a home in the heart of this runaway slave from Colossae.

Amazingly, Paul knew Onesimus’ master, Philemon. Or perhaps he only knew of Philemon through their mutual friend, Epaphras, for Paul had never been to Colossae himself, nor had he ever visited the church that met in Philemon’s house in Colossae (cf. Col. 2:1).

Although Onesimus had become very helpful to Paul, Paul thought it necessary for this slave to return to his master, and so he sent him along with this letter to make his reception with his master a favourable one. This could have been a difficult reunion, for Onesimus was not only runaway property, but he had also probably been a thief of his master’s money. Paul hints of this in verse 18, “But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account.”

Paul's labor in the gospel found one of God's elect in this slave. In some ways Onesimus was typical of God's elect. He was not a wise man after the flesh. He was not a mighty man in stature. He was not a noble one of the earth. No, Onesimus is like most of God's elect, for

<sup>27</sup>God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; <sup>28</sup>and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, <sup>29</sup>that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

Onesimus was a runaway slave and thief, but he was an object of God's sovereign electing grace. As **Charles Spurgeon** once described him:

He ran away from Colossae, therefore, and thinking that he would be less likely to be discovered by the ministers of justice, he sought the city of Rome... There, in those back slums ... Onesimus would go and hide. Or among those gangs of thieves which infested the imperial city, he would not be known or heard of any more, so he thought—and he could live the free and easy life of a thief. Yet, mark you, the Lord looked out of Heaven with an eye of love and set that eye on Onesimus! Were there no *free men*, that God must elect a *slave*? Were there no faithful servants, that He must choose one who had embezzled his master's money? Were there none of the educated and polite, that He must look upon a barbarian? Were there none among the moral and the excellent that Infinite Love should fix itself upon this degraded being who was now mixed up with the very scum of society? ... And yet Eternal Love, which passed by kings and princes and left Pharisees and Sadducees, philosophers and magi to stumble in the dark as they chose, fixed its eyes upon this poor benighted creature that he might be made a vessel to honor, fit for the Master's use!—...“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” rolls like thunder from the Cross of Calvary and from the Mount of Sinai. The Lord is Sovereign and does as He pleases. Let us admire that marvelous electing love which selected such a one as Onesimus!<sup>3</sup>

God's Word teaches the wondrous doctrine of election. ***God has chosen certain persons from fallen humanity to be recipients of His salvation, having chosen them before creation in Christ, not based on any foreseen condition or response of them, but solely due to His own good pleasure according to the purpose of His will.***

Election follows the understanding of man's total depravity, or total inability to come to God. Left on his own, even after having been instructed, admonished, persuaded, and pleaded with, Onesimus would still choose to reject God's rule over him. The reason is that Onesimus was dead, incapable and unwilling to do the things God had commanded him. His salvation must originate from outside of himself. It originates in God's election.

There is no indication in the Scriptures of a reason that God chose the ones He chose, passing over the others, other than it was good in His sight and it was in accord with His purpose to glorify Himself in His grace.

God's election is unto salvation. Although certainly God's election of some, means His passing over others, hence, a doctrine of reprobation, nevertheless, election is always presented in the Scriptures positively unto salvation. Persons are not elected to damnation; persons are elected to salvation.

We affirm, that as Jesus Christ never intended to give remission of sins and eternal life unto any but His sheep (John 10:15; 17:2; Eph. 5:25,26,27; Rev. 5:9); so these sheep only have their sins washed away in the blood of Christ: The vessels of wrath, as they are none of Christ's sheep, nor ever believe in Him, so they have not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon them, neither are partakers of Him: And therefore have all their sins remaining upon them, and are not saved by Christ from any of them under any consideration whatsoever; but must lie under the intolerable burden of them eternally. The truth of this appears unto us

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<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 21, sermon #1268.

by the light of these Scriptures compared together, Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 3:14; Matt. 7:23; Eph. 5:6; 2 Tim. 1:9; John 8:24. (First London Confession of Faith with an appendix by Benjamin Cox, 1646.)

The Bible also speaks of predestination. Election and predestination are not the same, although people frequently use those two terms synonymously. Election speaks of God's choice of people. Predestination speaks of what end or purpose God has chosen them. Predestination describes God's design for the ones He elected. He has predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), to become His adopted sons (Eph. 1:5), and to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11).

God had *elect* Onesimus in eternity past to become one of his own. God had *predestined* Onesimus to become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Until God's purpose of salvation had begun to be seen in Onesimus, reconciliation and fellowship with his Christian master would not have been possible.

Not only did God save Onesimus due to His electing love and purpose in predestination, God saved Onesimus through the work of His *providence*. Not only is there sovereign grace in God's election, but there must be sovereign grace in providence also, if the elect are going to be saved. Providence is similar to the word and idea of "provide", or "provision." Many of you made provision for your Sunday afternoon meal; you have made preparations ahead of time. You planned what you would provide your family. You purchased what you needed. Perhaps some preparations have already been made. The final preparation will be made just before you set your family down together to enjoy what you have designed and provided for them. Similarly, God in His providence very skilfully prepares for the conversion of the ones that He elected to Himself in eternity. The providence of God is His carefully managing of events ahead of time to bring about His purposes. You have through your providence arranged for a meal. God through His providence arranges for the salvation of His elect.

Now we could consider God's providence in a *negative* way. When we speak of God's providence we generally speak of positive things that fall out for the benefit of His people. But God's providence brings about His judgment upon sinners also. There is no escape for the wicked. God will see to it in His providence that the wicked reap what they have sown.

But we most commonly speak of God's providence in bringing about good for His people. But this often comes in the form of what on the surface may seem to be great difficulty and trouble. For God in His sovereignty—His all-powerful control over all events—uses all events both good and bad, both sinful acts of men and those that are not, in order to bring about His purposes of grace in His people.

Consider God's providence in the life of Onesimus. Philemon had been a good master to Onesimus. I suspect that Philemon would have seen to it that his entire household, including his slaves, attended the church service that was conducted weekly in his house. Onesimus was privileged to hear the word of God regularly. But God in His providence sent Onesimus to far off Rome where he would be converted under the ministry and message of the apostle Paul. So God used Onesimus' sin of thievery, rebellion, and escape, to bring about his salvation. This was similar to what Joseph could say to his brothers who had years before mercilessly beat him and then sold him into slavery into Egypt,

Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. (Gen. 50:19f)

Some of us may question God regarding what we are encountering in life. We ask, "Why, Lord?" The response might be as Paul gave to Philemon in **verse 15 and 16**,

For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Let us trust God to deal with us wisely in His providence. Let us also be mindful of God's providential dealings in people's lives when we see that they are having problems, as Paul no doubt saw in Onesimus, for perhaps the Lord is bringing the events about to glorify Himself in manifesting His saving grace.

We also displayed through the life of Onesimus the grace of God in *conversion* of sinners. Now God in His providence had brought Onesimus to Rome and also brought Onesimus to come into contact with Paul from whom he heard the gospel and was converted to Christ. Maybe Onesimus had been arrested and placed into the same jail cell? Who knows, but God brought them together. But how was it that Onesimus received the message in Rome but had refused it in Colossae? Was it because Paul could make the gospel more clear and convincing than those in the church at Colossae? No, people are not converted because of the style of the delivery of the message. Was it because it was necessary for Onesimus to have “to hit the bottom” in Rome, as say the prodigal son did in the far off country? Was it because all of a sudden he was “willing” whereas before he was not? Now, although all of these things may have been true in this case, ultimately there is only one answer to the reason that Onesimus was converted in Rome and not in Colossae—God in His grace determined that it would be so. God by His grace elects the sinner to salvation. God by His grace directs the sinner to Himself. God in His grace converts the sinner to Himself in His own way and in His own time. As Paul could once write, “By the grace of God I am what I am God”, so every true Christian may confess the same.

John Newton penned the words, I “was blind, but now I see.” To what did he attribute the change? It was God’s *amazing grace*. God must bring the blind sinner to see his sinful condition and his guilt before God for His sin. God must give him a holy concern for his soul and a desire to be delivered from his sin. As Jesus Christ once opened the blind man’s eyes so that he could see “every man clearly”, so the Spirit of God opens the blind eyes of a sinner’s heart that he may see his sinful condition clearly and God’s remedy for sin clearly in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As God opened the heart of Lydia to attend to “the things which were spoken of Paul”, so God opened the heart of Onesimus to attend the things which were spoken by Paul” (cf. Acts 16:14).

Paul described his own conversion in this way.

And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But *when it pleased God*, who separated me from my mother’s womb and *called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me*, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood. (Gal. 1:14-16)

There is a time and place when God summons His chosen ones to salvation. It is an inward work of grace in the soul. Again, Paul wrote, “When it pleased God... and (He) *called me* through His grace, to reveal His Son *in me*. God extends this inward call to specific individuals. This is the call of God which is heard by them “who have ears to hear.” The Holy Spirit issues this effectual call to the elect through the general call of the gospel (cf. 2 Thess. 2:14). This call is effectual, always accomplishing the purpose for which it was issued—the salvation of God’s chosen ones. Onesimus had been called of God to salvation. This is why he was converted in Rome in the presence of Paul.

We may also see illustrated in the life of Onesimus the Grace of God in his transformed character. When God saves a person from sin, He changes him wholly by His grace. In Onesimus we had a self-willed thieving runaway slave whose primary goal in life was independence from his master. His former service reflected his former character. Paul wrote to Philemon in verse 11a, “who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.” But having undergone a transformation by the life-changing grace of God Paul could write, “but now is profitable to you and to me” (v.11b). The grace of God would make this man a better servant, a better citizen, a better man.

Notice that Onesimus now possessed a desire to make restitution. How sorrowful Onesimus must have felt for his former attitudes and behaviour! He would return to Colossae and return to his owner, and seek to live rightly before God in that place. Onesimus was a product of the grace of God. Onesimus was a trophy to the praise of God’s grace.

The Lord is in the business of saving people to “the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:6). Our great desire should be to be used by our God to see His purposes realized. May our Lord help us to be attentive to God’s dealings in the lives of those around us, so that we might be useful servants of Jesus Christ in bringing to pass His purpose in grace.

## II. Greetings from Paul's Companions (4:10-14)

<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.

### 3. Aristarchus

We read in Colossians 4:10, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you.” Including this reference, Aristarchus is mentioned 5 times in the Scriptures. He is mentioned three times in Acts (19:29; 20:4; 27:2), once here in Colossians 4:10, and also in Philemon 24. Let us consider each of these.

#### a. Acts 19:29.

In Acts 19 we read of the riot that occurred in Ephesus because of the uproar caused by the idol makers. Their trade was failing because of the large numbers of idolaters being converted through the gospel to Jesus Christ. In the midst of this turmoil, we first read of Aristarchus.

<sup>29</sup>So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and *Aristarchus*, Macedonians, *Paul's travel companions*. <sup>30</sup>And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. <sup>31</sup>Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. (Acts 19:29-31)

Even at this early time, Aristarchus was a member of Paul's ministry team as they evangelized Asia Minor and established the church in the city of Ephesus.

#### b. Acts 20:4.

Aristarchus left Ephesus with Paul and they travelled across the northern Aegean Sea to Macedonia, where the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were located.

After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. <sup>2</sup>Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece <sup>3</sup>and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup>And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia--also *Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians*, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. <sup>5</sup>These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. (Act 20:1 NKJ)

Here we learn that Aristarchus (and Secundus) were originally from Thessalonica. Aristarchus had probably travelled with the apostle Paul for quite some time.

#### c. Acts 27:2.

The context of this verse is the long sailing voyage of the apostle Paul under guard being taken to Rome where he would be tried before Caesar.

And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. <sup>2</sup>So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. *Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.* <sup>3</sup>And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. <sup>4</sup>When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. (Acts 27:1-4)

We have confirmed that Aristarchus was from Thessalonica in Macedonia. Here he is with Paul, travelling from Palestine to Rome. He had been with Paul for quite a long time, serving with him in the gospel.

#### d. Philemon 24.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, <sup>24</sup> as do Mark, *Aristarchus*, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. <sup>25</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. (Philemon 24)

Aristarchus is one of several “fellow laborers” with the apostle.

e. **Colossians 4:10.** Here Paul identifies Aristarchus as his “fellow prisoner.” “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you.”

#### 4. Mark

This reference is also in verse 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)*...” Mark also greeted the church along with Aristarchus and Justus.

There was a time when Paul would not have commended Mark before others. Mark had failed Paul on his first missionary journey. When Barnabus wanted to take Mark with him and Paul on their second missionary journey, Paul resisted. The tension resulted in Paul and Barnabus parting from one another travelling to separate mission fields. We read of Mark’s original failure in Acts 13:13, “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; *and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*” Here “John” would have been “John Mark”, or simply “Mark.”

We read of the severance between Paul and Barnabus in Acts 15.

<sup>36</sup>Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” <sup>37</sup>Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup>But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup>Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. <sup>41</sup>And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:36-41)

But Barnabus, the son of consolation, must have worked with Mark to bring him to repentance. And although Paul had once rejected Mark due to his failure, he would much later write of Mark in his last epistle to Timothy, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). And here in Colossians 4:10 he commended Mark to be received by the brethren of the church in Colossae.

#### 5. Justus

Just a brief word is given here of Justus. Justus is not mentioned anywhere else in the Scriptures. Here he greeted the church through the apostle. Once again, verse 10 reads, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner

greet 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 three men listed together, Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus, were Jewish men, in fact they were the only Jewish Christians who were serving actively with the apostle Paul in the work of the kingdom. Verses 10 and 11 read together this way:

<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.***

Paul’s ministry of the gospel was the work of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ was the enthroned Son of David, the promised King of Israel over the Kingdom of God that He had inaugurated and over which He rules as King. These Jewish men believed the New Testament teaching of the realized promised kingdom of God given to and through Israel. They were fellow workers in the expansion of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 6. Epaphras

We read in Colossians 4:12 of this fellow servant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“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.”

This is a familiar name to us. Paul had mentioned Epaphras back in Colossians 1.

<sup>3</sup>We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>***as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,*** <sup>8</sup>***who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.*** (Col. 1:3-8)

Epaphras was the one who had evangelized Colossae. He had probably been converted under Paul in Ephesus. Afterward he returned to his hometown of Colossae and the Lord blessed his witness to the conversion of souls the establishment of the church. Again, “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.” And then the next verse speaks of the labor that he put forth on their behalf. “For I bear him witness ***that he has worked hard for you*** and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis” (Col. 4:13). Prayer is “hard” work that involves “struggling” if we are to be faithful as Epaphras was faithful.

Epaphras not only served his home church at Colossae, but he also labored in prayer for the churches at Laodicea and a church located in Hierapolis. This is the only place in the Scriptures that Hierapolis is mentioned. Laodicea was in the Lycus Valley about 10 miles west of Colossae. Hierapolis was in the foothills about 5 miles north of Laodicea. Hierapolis was a “resort” even in Roman days due to its many hot mineral springs. It remains a tourist destination today, known commonly as Pamukkale.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See pictures of the terraced “springs” by searching “Pamukkale, Turkey.”

## 7. Luke

We read of another Gentile Christian in Luke. Paul wrote, “Luke the beloved physician greets you...” (Col. 4:14). Luke was a travelling companion of Paul for extended periods of time. He must have cared for Paul, perhaps serving as his physician when Paul was incarcerated. Although the name of Luke is very familiar to us, he is mentioned fewer times than Aristarchus. Luke is only named 3 times in the New Testament: here in Colossians 4:14, in 2 Timothy 4:11 and in Philemon 24.

## 8. Demas

Demas is mentioned only briefly, as also sending his greeting. “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas” (Col. 4:14). He is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4 as an apostate. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Be diligent to come to me quickly; *for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica*” (2 Tim. 4:9).

### III. Greetings to Various Friends (4:15-17)

<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.”

## 9. Nympha

It would seem that the church at Laodicea met in the house of Nympha. She must have been a woman of some prominence and wealth to be able to sponsor a church in her house. Many of the early churches met in houses. When there were more people in a church than one house could contain, a second house would be used. This was a matter of convenience more than any other reason. For if it were possible, and I suspect often occurred, when circumstances permitted, churches would purchase their own buildings in which to gather the church for worship. This would have followed the pattern of the Jews who had their large synagogues everywhere a congregation could support them. I stood on the beautiful tiled floor of a large synagogue in the ruins of the city of Sardis, not too many dozens of miles from Colossae. There are some lands where house churches exist in great number, particularly in China. But this is largely due to the difficulty both economically and politically for churches to obtain their own church building. In places all over the world churches have begun in the house of a Christian family.

But some have taken this description of New Testament practice and have made it normative for today. They claim that the meeting of a church in a house is preferable and necessary in order to be like the churches of the New Testament. The assumption is that the blessing of God will be upon them, if the *place* of worship is the same as that practiced by the churches of the New Testament. This of course, is a faulty conclusion based on faulty reasoning. The place is only important to the degree that it is suitable for the worship of God. To argue that the limited space of a living room or a garage is more conducive to worship than a gathering in a building designed and dedicated for that purpose, is a hard sell. Nevertheless, the house church ideal appeals to some people. In my observation it commonly appeals to those in our society that tend to be anti-authoritarian in their personality and their social and political opinion. They react to “established” churches for they see them as formal and liturgical and traditional, where the house church is more personal and intimate. Some are advocating that this new and growing movement will be the rescuer of the church in this modern age (e.g. George Barna). But the movement has a faulty basis. *The place of gathering is irrelevant.* The fact is that a house is not generally conducive to activities of church life. They are too limited in space and accommodation for numerical growth. Many times, also, the small congregation is influenced heavily, and in an unhealthy way, by the leader who is often untrained and ill-equipped for the gospel ministry. He has deemed himself qualified to be in the ministry, but he has never undergone the

scrutiny or the endorsement of an established congregation to commend him to the gospel ministry. Often times these small start-up house churches are out of balance theologically and they only serve to weaken established churches by drawing away members from them. Please do not misunderstand, I am not in a general way condemning house churches, I only am denying the assumption of many that the Lord would have His people everywhere meet in house churches as a condition of His blessing. I also want you folks to be aware of some of the problems and dangers that are commonly found in them.

## 10. Archippus

Archippus is the last person mentioned. Colossians 4:17 reads, “And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’” Paul mentioned this man in the opening words to his epistle to Philemon.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, <sup>2</sup> to the beloved Apphia, *Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house*: (Phm. 1:1f)

Archippus was a “fellow soldier” to Paul. He was probably the son of Philemon. His mother was probably Apphia. But here in Colossians 4:17 Paul exhorts this man openly before others about his responsibility to be faithful to the ministry. “And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’” Here we see that the Lord calls men to the ministry. Men of God receive their ministry from the Lord. They have a duty to be faithful to the Lord who conferred upon them this privilege and responsibility.

## IV. Paul’s Salutation (4:15-18)

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

Paul would commonly dictate his letters to a secretary who recorded Paul’s words. But because there were letters written by others that were falsely claimed to have been written by Paul (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-3), Paul would sign each of his letters with his own hand in order to authenticate them as genuinely his compositions (cf. Galatians 6:11).

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Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 117)

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