

## Intro

This morning we finish Colossians. I chose Colossians because I wanted a book that covered biblical spirituality. How we do the Christian life from the time we're born again to the time we die.

Colossians has everything. The gospel hope of forgiveness of sins and a new heart through Jesus' death and resurrection. The lordship of Jesus. What we pray. Growing in wisdom and knowledge. Continuing in the faith. Maturing in the faith. Rejecting manmade religion. A holistic Christian life where the way we do life in the local church, the way we do marriage, the way we do parent-child relationships, the way we do work, the way we do evangelism is shaped by our commitment to Jesus.

Let's consider Paul's closing comments today.

## READ PASSAGE

**BIG IDEA: Colossians is all about continuing and completeness.**

## Body

### Passage Focus

We'll consider what's going on in these final verses. We'll note the people involved. Then we'll draw some points of application.

### General Explanation/What's Going On

Paul is ending his letter.

### Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9)

The two were sent by Paul to Colossae with the letter we've been studying.

**Tychicus** (4:7-8) – Was with Paul when they departed Greece in Acts 20:3-4. Paul sends Tychicus to Ephesus when Paul's execution is imminent (2 Tim 4:12).

Paul also tasked Tychicus to deliver Ephesians (Eph 6:21-22).

**Onesimus** (4:9) – the book of Philemon is about Onesimus. Onesimus was a runaway slave that had wronged his master Philemon (Philem 18). Onesimus made his way to Rome, met the imprisoned Paul, believed, and became "useful" while converted (Philem 10-11). Paul then sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter encouraging Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ (Philem 12-16).

There was a church in Philemon's house (Philem 2).

*Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker <sup>2</sup> and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. – Philemon 1-3*

The church in Philemon's house was likely in Colossae. Writing to the Colossians, Paul says Onesimus is "one of you" (4:9). And Paul has a special message for Archippus in 4:17, indicating that Archippus is a Colossian believer.

Putting it all together, Paul's imprisoned in Rome and he's sending Tychicus and Onesimus from Rome to deliver letters to both the Colossians and Philemon. And likely they were carrying Ephesians too.

- 1) Delivering three apostolic letters that were Scripture = highly trusted individuals.
- 2) They would fill in the Colossians on Paul's situation not mentioned in the letter.
- 3) They were sent to encourage the Colossians.

*I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, – 4:8*

- 4) They could answer any questions the Colossians might have about the letter.

### **Aristarcus, Mark, Jesus called Justus (4:10-11)**

*"only men of the circumcision"* (4:11) = Jewish descent. Everyone else was a Gentile.

**Aristarcus** (4:10) – With Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Departed Greece with Paul and Tychicus in Acts 20:3-4. *"a Macedonian from Thessalonica"* and one who set sail for Italy with prisoner Paul per Acts 27:1-2. *"my fellow prisoner"* (4:10) = a prisoner with Paul in Rome.

**Mark the cousin of Barnabas** (4:10) – John Mark lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey (Acts 12:25). Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia (Acts 15:38). This led to the famous "sharp disagreement" that split Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:39. Paul worked with Silas while Barnabas worked with Mark (Acts 15:39-40).

Colossians is written at least ten years after the "sharp disagreement." If Mark visits the Colossians, they should welcome him (4:10), meaning Paul and Mark reconciled. Mark is now Paul's fellow worker and one who brings Paul comfort (4:11).

Later, when Paul's death was imminent, he said this about Mark:

*"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."* – 2 Timothy 4:11

I share this to highlight reconciliation. The one Paul wouldn't travel with was now "useful" and a "comfort."

- 1) Broken relationships can be restored.
- 2) Failure can be forgiven.
- 3) People can learn from their mistakes. We can learn from our mistakes!
- 4) People can change. We can change!
- 5) Those who've disappointed us can mature and become a blessing to us.

Church history ascribes the Gospel of Mark to this man who once disappointed Paul.

**Jesus called Justus** (4:11) – this man isn't referenced anywhere else in the New Testament.

## **Epaphras, Luke, Demas (4:12-14)**

**Epaphras** (4:12-13) – “*one of you*” (4:12) = a native Colossian believer. The Colossians learned the gospel from Epaphras (1:7), making him the church’s founder. What Paul knew about the Colossian church he learned from Epaphras (1:8). He worked for Laodicea and Hierapolis too. Towns nearby Colossae. Epaphras was likely a church planter for all three churches who maintained pastoral oversight.

Epaphras “greet you” = still with Paul (4:12).

**Luke** (4:14) – a Gentile physician who authored the Gospel of Luke and Acts. He was a traveling companion of Paul on Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journeys, arriving with Paul at Rome (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). He was with Paul when execution was imminent (2 Tim 4:11).

**Demas** (4:14) – a trusted co-worker (Philem 24) who later deserted Paul per 2 Timothy 4:10.

## **Laodicea (4:15-16)**

Paul tells the Colossians to greet the believers in Laodicea, as well as Nympha and the church that met in her house (4:15). Likely Nympha was Laodicean, suggesting that there were more than one house church in Laodicea. This isn’t to suggest that Nympha was the leader of the church in her house. Note 1 Timothy 2:12 where Paul does “*not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.*” And 1 Timothy 3:2 where elders must be “*the husband of one wife.*” Nympha’s home suggests she was a wealthy widow who inherited the home from her husband. The Colossian believers knew who she was.

Paul tells the Colossian church to read Colossians publicly, then pass it on to the Laodicean church (4:16). Maybe they copied it? This means early churches passed Paul’s writings on to one another. Early on, Paul’s letters were considered Scripture. Several years later (2-5?) the apostle Peter wrote:

*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.* – 2 Peter 3:15-16

Paul’s letters were regarded as Scripture on the same level as the Old Testament several years after they were written! Early on the church was recognizing New Testament books as Scripture.

Evidently Laodicea possessed a letter from Paul that has been lost and wasn’t included in the Bible.

## **Archippus (4:17)**

Earlier we read how Archippus was greeted along with Philemon (Philem 2). The Colossians knew Archippus personally, indicating he was member of the Colossian church. He met with Colossian believers in Philemon’s home.

## **Final words (4:18)**

Paul claims authorship, asking them to remember him in prayer since he’s imprisoned. And Paul expresses his prayer wish for them: God’s grace. This is empowering grace.

When Paul cried out for relief from his thorn in the flesh, Paul got a response from God.

*But he [God] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9*

God empowers us with his grace sufficient for what we're experiencing. That's empowering grace.

### **Point 1: Faithfulness matters (4:7-9, 17)**

Tychicus is a "faithful minister" such that Paul can entrust him with delivering Paul's letters, representing Paul before the Colossians, and encouraging the Colossians spiritually (4:8).

Faithful = trustworthy, dependable, reliable.

Minister = one who performs helpful service.

Onesimus is a "faithful" brother as well.

Paul instructs Archippus to be faithful:

*"See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." – 4:17*

Fulfill = completing, successfully carrying out, accomplishing one's duties. Here's it's an unspecified service. Perhaps gospel service: reaching non-Christians with the gospel and edifying believers.

### **Application**

My point here is **faithfulness matters**. Paul wouldn't discharge these grand duties to just anyone. He needed someone who was dependable. Who would carry out what was expected well.

We may not all be pastors/elders, but we all have areas where we are called to serve. Paul's reeled off several responsibilities in Colossians: responsibilities to Christians in the local church (3:12-17), responsibilities to our spouse (3:18-19), responsibilities of parents and children (3:20-21), responsibilities of slaves and masters (3:22-4:1) = for us employees and employers. The responsibility of Christians to speak the gospel to non-Christians. Whatever areas apply for us, we want to faithfully carry out our responsibilities.

In PCC we could add dependable service as trustees, fellowship ministry, deacons, Junior Church, Sunday school, clerk, treasurer, finance, missions ministry. Fulfill your ministry.

We all have areas where we serve. The question is, are we faithful? Thus the need to pray daily for God's empowering grace. God works in us to help us be faithful. One way we recognize mature/complete Christianity is when basic callings are carried out faithfully. That's biblical spirituality.

Children, if you want to be given responsibility and freedom, you need to demonstrate reliability, dependability. Examine yourselves. And ask God for grace to be dependable.

### **Point 2: Fellowship matters (4:7-11)**

The fellowship among these gospel co-workers and local churches is abundant.

- 1) "beloved brother" (4:7, 9)

- 2) “fellow servant” (4:7)
- 3) Encouraging the hearts of others (4:8)
- 4) Welcome Mark (4:10)
- 5) “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (4:11)
- 6) “struggling on your behalf in his prayers” (4:12)
- 7) “worked hard for you”
- 8) Greeting one another (4:14-15)
- 9) Sharing Paul’s letters (4:16)
- 10) Encouraging one another to carry out one’s ministry faithfully (4:17)
- 11) Praying for God’s empowering grace to sustain one another (4:18).

That’s love for one another, seeing one another as co-workers under Jesus, encouraging one another’s hearts when we’re discouraged, welcoming each other, praying for one another’s spiritual good, laboring for each other’s spiritual good, sharing good Christian resources with each other, challenging one another to faithfulness.

### **Networking**

I also noticed the bond between believers separated by great distances. And the collaboration between local churches in nearby areas.

- 1) Tychicus going wherever he’s needed.
- 2) People spread apart in contact with one another. Kind of like pastors spread through America in contact.
- 3) People spread apart praying for one another.
- 4) Jews and Gentiles = different ethnicities working together in different places.
- 5) Local churches in different towns knowing one another.
- 6) The early church worked together in gospel ministry even though they were separated by distance.

We have apostles, authors of Scripture, church planters, pastors, traveling representatives all in contact with one another working together.

### **Point 3: Prayer matters (4:12)**

Epaphras is *“always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God”* (4:12).

- 1) Prayer is a struggle (metaphorically fighting like a gladiator) on behalf of fellow Christians.
- 2) Praying that they “stand” = firmness, holding one’s ground = resisting false, manmade religion while continuing in faith in Christ alone.
- 3) Praying that they’d be mature (fully formed) or complete (not lacking) = no area of life untouched by God’s word. False religion could corrupt maturity!
- 4) Praying that they’d be fully assured of all God’s will.

“fully assured” = complete certainty, absolutely sure = total confidence in God’s will. God’s will can mean what God commands of us or what God has planned and is unknown to us. Here it’s complete confidence in what God has revealed. Complete confidence that God’s commands are right and good. In order to be mature/complete, we need to be confident in God’s commands.

Paul also prays when he says, “*Grace be with you*” (4:18). Paul asks for God to supply them with empowering grace so that they’ll continue and mature in confidence in God.

### **Application**

This is what a pastor prays for his people. We should pray these things for one another. We should pray these things for ourselves.

### **Point 4: Maturity matters (4:12)**

Epaphras prayed for maturity and full assurance.

If I had to sum up Colossians, I’d say something like **Colossians is all about continuing in the faith and pressing on towards completeness (no area of life untouched by God’s word) in submission to Jesus’ lordship and full confidence in Jesus, through God’s empowering grace.**

Completeness speaks to every aspect of the Christian life: local church fellowship, marriage, parent-child relationships, employee-employer relationships, personal evangelism. The gospel, our faith in Jesus, touches every area of our existence. Biblical spirituality is more than forgiveness of sins. More than heavenly hope. More than devotions in the morning. More than a Sunday morning experience.

Jesus saves us to make us new. To change us. To alter every aspect of our existence.

Learning is for living (maturity). And learning is for confidence in God (fully assured).

### **Conclusion**

**Colossians is all about continuing and completeness.** Colossians highlights holistic (touching all of life) Christianity.

- 1) We continue towards completeness by submitting to Jesus’ lordship.
- 2) We continue towards completeness by rejecting false religion.
- 3) We continue towards completeness by continuing how we began: faith in Jesus.
- 4) We continue towards completeness by growing in knowledge and wisdom.
- 5) We continue towards completeness by increasing our confidence in God.
- 6) We continue towards completeness by killing sin and establishing godly patterns.
- 7) We continue towards completeness by living in community with other Christians.
- 8) We continue towards completeness by following God’s design for marriage.
- 9) We continue towards completeness by following God’s design for parenting.
- 10) We continue towards completeness by doing work well.
- 11) We continue towards completeness by speaking the gospel well.