

PAUL'S PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS (Colossians 4:7-11)

Way back in 1990—almost 36 years ago—I began writing an *annual Christmas letter* that we sent out to our family and friends. Sometimes we got them out before Christmas, sometimes shortly after, and sometimes not until after the first of the year. But I was pretty consistent in sending them out! Over the past 35 years, there were only **two times** that I failed to send out a letter. I never did come up with a catchy name for them, but as time went on, they became more of a “year in review” than a Christmas letter—meaning it was a recap of what had happened in our family since the letter from the year before.

None of you—other than Abbey—have gotten one of *those* letters. You get a *different* Christmas letter—and card—but you do not get one of these “year-in-review” letters—and that’s a **good** thing! Why? Because with the exception of sending them to my family, I only send them to people that I **used to** (past tense) attend church with! In other words, you’ll only get one of these if **I move** away—or if **you move** away!

These letters were originally typed out with a typewriter—some of you young people don’t even know what that is—until computers became less expensive and we were able to afford one. The letters were copied, of course—not individually typed out one at a time. But even though the letters were copied—and were all the same—I **personalized** them in a couple of ways.

First, I would usually **sign** them individually. In other words, I didn’t print out a copy, sign it, then photocopy the copy that had my signature on it. I’m not saying that **I never did**; but I usually didn’t.

The **second** thing I tried to do was this: **add a personal note** on the bottom of each letter. It might be a note about a special memory...or letting them know that I received their card...or a “we really need to get together sometime” note.

So why bring up a **Christmas letter** in a sermon that I’m preaching near the end of July? Because as we finish up the book of Colossians, we see Paul adding a similar **personal touch** to the end of this letter! Not only does he “sign it” (Col 4:18)—he also personalizes it! So to compare verses 7-18 to the **credits** given at the end of a movie doesn’t accurately reflect their significance! We shouldn’t hurriedly “skip over” them—like we do at the end of a movie—and we shouldn’t leave the room to put our uneaten snacks back in the kitchen!

Although I’m not going to preach on **all these** verses today, I do want to read the entire passage so you get the flow of what Paul is saying—and see his heart in it. So—if you aren’t there yet—please turn to Colossians 4 and follow along as I read verses 7-18. Big Picture, there seems to be **two** points of emphasis in the verses I just read. **First**—in verses 7-11—we have Paul’s personal interest in the Colossian believers. **Second**—in verses 12-18—we have Paul’s pastoral priorities. This morning, we will be looking at verses 7-11.

First, let’s consider... **1. The mission of the messengers (vss 7-9)**

How do we know they were **messengers**? In verse 7, Paul describes Tychicus, then says in verse 8 “Whom I have **sent** unto you...” But Tychicus wasn’t the only messenger Paul sent! Verse 9 says, “**With** Onesimus...” So Paul gave Tychicus and Onesimus a mission and sent them **from Rome**—roughly 1000 miles away—to the church at Colosse.

A. The men. **Who** were the men that Paul sent as messengers?

1) Tychicus. Notice Paul’s description of him in vs 7: he “is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord.” We can’t spend a lot of time on this descr, but I do want to highlight a few things.

--He is called “beloved” because he is **loved**—not just by Paul, but also by God!

--He is called a “brother,” **not** because he was a **sibling** of Paul’s—but because he was a brother in the Lord.

--He was a “faithful minister,” with the word “minister” meaning **servant**—as opposed to a pastor.

--And “fellow servant” would be better translated “bond-slave”—not to Paul, but to Christ.

Christ is the one that redeemed Tychicus and “bought him” from the penalty of his sin by dying in his place.

So what else do we know about Tychicus? His name is mentioned **five times** in the New Testament—all connected to the apostle Paul!

--In Acts 20:4, we learn that he is one the seven men who accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey “when he returned from Corinth to Macedonia” (David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT – Colossians and Philemon*; pg 308).

--He was with Paul during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment—and that is why he could “make known” unto the Colossians “the things which are done here” as stated in vs 9.

--Not only did he carry **this** letter to the church **at Colosse**, notice on your outline what it says in **Ephesians 6:21-22**: “But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: ²² **Whom I have sent unto you** for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.” Sounds a lot like what we have here in Colossians 4!

--On top of that, he probably was also the deliverer of the **letter to the Laodiceans** referred to in vs 16—and the letter to **Philemon!** In other words, Tychicus was someone Paul **could count on!**

--And his faithfulness and trustworthiness are seen in more than just carrying letters! In **Titus 3:12**, Paul informed Titus he was going to send **either Artemas or Tychicus** to take Titus’ place in Crete so Titus could come and visit Paul.

--Lastly—according to II Timothy 4:12—Tychicus is **sent to Ephesus** to take over **Timothy’s pastoral duties** so Timothy could go see Paul during his second Roman imprisonment.

No wonder Paul called Tychicus a beloved brother—and a faithful servant!

The next man mentioned is... **2) Onesimus**. What do we know about Onesimus? In verse 9, he is called a “faithful and beloved brother”—meaning he was a **child** of God in the **family** of God. That “short but sweet,” rather ordinary description would have **caused quite a stir** at the church in Colosse, though! **Why?**

Because they knew Onesimus! He “is one of you” Paul wrote, meaning he was **from Colosse**. But there’s more to it than that! They knew him because he was a **runaway slave**...who belonged to a man named **Philemon**...who owned the house where the believers of Colosse met for church (according to Philemon 2)!

So why would Paul call a runaway slave—who probably **stole from his master** Philemon when he left town—“a faithful and beloved brother?” We would have no idea if it weren’t for the letter Paul **wrote to Philemon!** But from that letter we learn that Onesimus **left Philemon**, traveled all the way **to Rome**, and “just so happens” to run into the apostle Paul—who leads Onesimus to saving faith in Christ!

So Onesimus is now indeed a “faithful and beloved brother”—not the runaway slave! I love how **John MacArthur** put it: “Christ makes sure a man with a past has a past that’s passed.” (Gty.org; “With a Little Help from My Friends,” Colossians 4:7-18). And all God’s people ought to say? Amen!

B. The mission

So what was the **mission**...what was the task...that Paul gave these two men to do?

1) Declare Paul’s state to them. We see that in the beginning of verse 7: “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you.” “State,” of course, means **condition**—not a location like Wisconsin or Illinois! In the Greek, it literally reads, “all the things concerning me.” (Pao, 308). What kind of things? We aren’t told, but probably things that have to do with his **living conditions** while imprisoned in Rome.

Here’s a question for you: **Why** would Paul want them to know how he was doing? Isn’t it kind of egotistical of Paul to say (and/or think) they would be **concerned about** what he was going through—especially in light of the fact that he **did not start** the church and had **never even visited** Colosse!

No; it is not egotistical! **Paul** wanted them to know because **they** wanted to know! And we know that from Colossians 1! Notice what it says in verses 3-4 (read). Paul and Timothy had heard of their saving faith in Christ—and the love that they had for fellow believers. How? Through Epaphras! In Col 1:7, Epaphras’ name is mentioned; in Col 1:8, we see that he is the one “who also declared unto us **your love** in the Spirit!”

So the Colossians were doing what **believers are supposed to do**—love fellow believers—even ones they had never met! And if their **church founder Epaphras** loved Paul, they had no problems loving him too!

What about you? Do you love fellow believers? **We're supposed to**, aren't we—and Jesus Himself taught us that! **John 13:35** "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye **have love one to another.**" Notice what Paul wrote in **I Thessalonians 4:9** "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are **taught of God to love one another.**"

In other words, 'You don't need to be taught to love one another because you already know you should!' So the question is, **do we** love one another? Even though our church is small, a number of our people have health issues that make it difficult for them to attend church sometimes. **Is the pastor** the only one that should **check on** our fellow brothers and sisters to see **how they are doing**—or is it something **more of you** can be involved in? We know the answer, right?

There was a **second** aspect of the mission that Paul had given to Tychicus and Onesimus and it was this:

2) Determine their state and "comfort" their hearts.

We see that in verse 8: "Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he [Tychicus] might know your estate, and comfort your hearts." "Estate," of course, means the same as "state" in vs 7.

So Paul didn't **just want** the Colossians to know how **he was doing**—he was concerned with how **they were doing!** And after hearing (and seeing) how they responded to what Paul wrote, Tychicus would know how to "comfort" their hearts. I don't expect you to remember this, but Paul used the same Greek word—"pah-rah-kah-LEH-oh"—back in Colossians 2:2. A good interpretive "rule of thumb" for a word that has more than one meaning—like this one—is to see **how it was used** earlier in the same letter.

In Colossians 2:2, "comfort" did not mean **trying to cheer someone up** who was going through a difficult time. We know that because the Colossian believers **weren't under persecution** and didn't need to be "comforted" in that sense!

What they did need, though, was to be **strengthened—to be encouraged**—in their fight against the false teaching of false teachers! In a nutshell, the false teachers were teaching that Christ was **not enough**.

Paul combats that by reminding them that in Christ is "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3) and that they are "complete in Him" (Col 2:10). So the "comfort"—the **encouragement** and **strengthening** of their hearts by Tychicus—was probably along the lines of "Know Christ, look to Christ, and stick to Christ! He is all you need!"

Next, let's consider verses 10 and 11 where we have ... **2. The comfort of the co-workers (vss 10-11)**

In vs 10, Paul refers to Aristarchus and Marcus; in vs 11 he refers to Jesus—called Justus. Why does he bring them up? Because they "saluteth you"—meaning **sent a greeting** to the Colossians—but also because they "have been a comfort unto me" it says in the end of vs 11.

A. The co-workers of Paul

So **who** were these three men? All three of them **were Jews**—that's what "of the circumcision" means in vs 11. And all three—although not mentioned much in the Bible—were "fellowworkers [co-workers] unto the kingdom of God." In other words, they were involved in the same work Paul was: **warning people** of their need to be **delivered from** the power of darkness—and **transferred into** the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13).

And we need to be doing the same! People need to be warned about the **bad** news before we give them the **good** news! What's the **bad** news? That they are **sinful**...and that their sin **disqualifies them** from heaven... and that they **cannot get rid of** their sin. Not only that, but people's minds are **blinded by Satan**—and they **don't even know it!**

We see **Jesus telling Paul** that very thing when he "knocked him off his high horse" on the road to Damascus! Notice what it says in **Acts 26:16, 18** "...for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness...¹⁸ **To open their eyes**, and to turn them from **darkness to light**, and from the

power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” **Paul obeyed** this command from God—and taught others to do the same! What else do we know about these men? I can’t spend as much time on them as I did on the other two, but here is a brief description of them—along with Bible references that you can look up later on your own.

1) Aristarchus. Aristarchus’ name appears **five times** in the NT—just like Tychicus! He was from Thessalonica (Acts 27:2), was with Tychicus on Paul’s third missionary journey (Acts 20:4), and is mentioned in the letter to Philemon (Philemon 24). Unlike Tychicus, though, Aristarchus was **seized** during a riot in the city of Ephesus—and drug into an arena in front of an angry mob that for two hours cried out, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:29-41). Here in vs 10, Paul calls him a “fellow-prisoner”—meaning he probably spent time in prison at some point for preaching the gospel.

2) Marcus. Marcus is the nephew of Barnabas—and the writer of the gospel of Mark. He is referred to as “John Mark” in the book of Acts (12:12) and started out with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). He quit mid-trip, however, and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Some time later, Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance, but Paul was dead-set against it—so much so that Paul and Barnabas **stopped being partners** (Acts 15:36-41). Paul has a **change of heart** about him, though, because here he says to “receive him” (Mark) if he comes to visit—and calls him “profitable to me for the ministry” near the end of his life (II Timothy 4:11).

3) Jesus, called Justus. What do we know about him? This is it—that he was a Jew, that he was a co-laborer of Paul’s, and that he was a comfort to him!

B. Their comfort to Paul

Notice again the middle of vs 11: “These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a **comfort** to me.” **How—in what way**—were they a comfort? We don’t know because we aren’t told! But we do know this—the Greek word used here is **different** than the one used in verse 8. In fact, this is the **only time** it appears in the Greek NT!

What does “comfort” mean? **Here it means** “to speak or counsel in a soothing way”—like medicine that takes away pain and discomfort” (HELPS Word-studies; Biblehub.com; Strong’s 3931).

So **what** did these men **say to Paul** that would have brought relief and been soothing to him? We have no idea, so why even guess, right? But there are **some observations** that we can make without knowing what was said.

1) Leaders need encouragement. If words of comfort weren’t important to Paul, God wouldn’t have led him to write it! And if Paul, the brilliant theologian—and a battle-tested, fearless preacher of the gospel and writer of Scripture—**needed** words of comfort from others, I most certainly do, too!

2) Our lives can be an encouragement to others. **Aristarchus** traveled with Paul, was persecuted for his faith, and was probably shipwrecked with Paul. And yet here he is in Rome, either visiting Paul or imprisoned with him. **The faithfulness** of Aristarchus would have been a comfort to Paul; it would have been a soothing thought to have someone by his side who had endured some of the same hardship that Paul had.

The life of Marcus would have been an encouragement b/c it reminded him that sometimes people fail, but God can pick them up, “dust them off,” and use them in a way that we didn’t think possible.

And the **life of Jesus**—which is called Justus—serves as a reminder that...

3) You don’t need to be a leader to be a “comforter.” **Pastors** are supposed to be comforters, but you don’t need to be a pastor to be a comforter! From what we know, this man “Jesus called Justus” wasn’t a leader—and he certainly wasn’t well known. But he was well known to Paul...and was a comforter to Paul...and was appreciated by Paul.

Lastly, **4) Any of us can be fellow-workers in the kingdom of God.** Although these three men were quite different, they all had one thing in common (besides being a comfort to Paul): they were **co-laborers with Paul** for the kingdom of God! In other words, they did their part in sharing the message of salvation—regardless of their standing in society or in the church. And God wants us to do the same, doesn’t He?

Paul was not a “Lone Ranger;” he was not a one-man show! He needed co-workers—and comforters—in the work of the ministry. **Any** of you—and **all** of you—can be both! That is God’s desire! Is it yours?

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. First—all of us—whether we realize it or not (or believe it or not)—are in **one** of **two** kingdoms: we are **in darkness**—and under the influence of Satan—or are a **child** of God in the **kingdom** of God!

--There is no **third** category—or kingdom!

--‘But Pastor, I’m undecided!’ That may be true for you—but being undecided shows you are under the influence of Satan! Why do I say that?

--Because you know you are a sinner!

--And you know—in your heart of hearts—that you can’t get rid of your guilt that comes with your sin!

--And you know—in your heart of hearts—that you will meet God some day!

So to think, I’m going to try to be forgiven my own way—and say “no” to God’s payment for you, Jesus Christ—proves you are under the influence of the devil—not God!

So what about you? Has there been a time in your life that you repented of your sins and personally received Jesus Christ as a gift? If not, you need to do that—today!

2. Second, if you are a child of God, do you love the brethren? Do you care for others? Paul certainly did, but that is the “job description” of all believers—not just pastors and leaders!

3. Third, if you are a child of God, are you a fellow-worker for God’s kingdom? God’s work is not a one-man show! If anyone could have been a one-man show, it would have been Paul! But he wasn’t!

--He needed co-workers—and he needed to be encouraged!

--Are you a co-worker?

--Are you an encourager?

--And let’s not forget what we learned last week: praying for one another—and your pastor—is a big part of being a co-worker in God’s kingdom!