

Colossians 4:7-18 and Conclusion

To Read:

1. Philemon
2. II Timothy 4

I. Introduction

A. This morning, we are finishing Colossians with Colossians 4:7-18

1. But, again, before we start, I want to remember what Colossians is about and how Colossians is organized
2. So, we'll start with our purpose statement for Colossians: Colossians calls us to see how truly glorious Jesus is and to root all of our hope in Him knowing that He is true wisdom to meet our every need. This will prevent us from instead pursuing the hopes and purposes of this world and being captured by worldly wisdom.
3. And we are looking at Colossians in four parts:
 - a. Rooted in the Gospel (~ chapter 1)
 - b. Refusing Worldly Wisdom (~ chapter 2)
 - c. Renewed in Christ (~ chapter 3)
 - d. Relational Truth (~ chapter 4)

B. For our last week in Colossians, we are looking at the fourth section of Colossians: Relational Truth

1. I've called this section 'relational truth' because Paul finishes his letter by focusing on relationships, and relationships seem to be at the core of Colossians - a central purpose for Colossians is to call us to exalt Christ-honoring relationships
2. Paul started his letter by reminding them of relationships, Colossians 1:1-2 - *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:*
3. Paul rejoiced that through Epaphras the Colossians did have a relationship with him, Colossians 1:7-8 - *just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.*
4. And Paul emphasized to the Colossians that though he had never been to Colossae, yet he loved and cared for them - the gospel had formed a real relationship between Paul and the Colossians, Colossians 2:1, 5 - *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face ... For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.*
5. And at the center of Paul's exhortation to the Colossians were relationships, first relationships within the church and then relationships within the family
6. Paul loved the relationships of the gospel and he wanted the Colossians to love those relationships too, so it shouldn't be strange to us that Paul finishes his letter with personal notes - greetings to and from specific people

C. But, trying to preach on twelve verses of personal notes can be quite a challenge

1. For one, most of what Paul says here are merely "hellos" - at first glance, there's not a lot of theological depth to hello, especially when it's repeated over and over
2. For another, we don't know anything about many of these people - who was Aristarchus? Who was Jesus who was called Justus? Who was Nympha? Who was Archippus? How can we figure out the importance of these greetings if we don't even know who the people were?
3. But, against these questions stands my conviction that everything in Scripture was written for our good - these greetings weren't accidental add-ons that made it into God's Word by default, God knew that these words would be recorded forever as His Word and He intentionally put them in here
4. So, we are going to spend a few minutes this morning seeing what we can glean from these verses

D. Let's read Colossians 4:7-18 together

E. Proposition: Having heard this book we need to live out it's exhortation in loving the gospel and pursuing gospel relationships in honor of Christ.

1. Paul emphasizes his desire to grow in relationship with the Colossians - sending representatives
2. Paul highlights men who are living out his instructions - recommending examples
3. Paul exhorts the church to live out his teaching - read and respond

II. Sending Representatives

A. Verse 7 clearly signals the end of Paul's letter as he introduces those who are carrying the letter - Tychicus and Onesimus

1. Colossians 4:7-8 - *Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 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.*

B. Tychicus is known from several very short references in the New Testament

1. He appears to be from the province of Asia and may have been chosen as one of the church representatives sent with Paul to provide accountability for the Jewish collection that was being sent to Jerusalem
2. Apparently he stayed with Paul and became almost like a personal representative for Paul, especially when he couldn't travel - so Tychicus is sent to Colossae, to Ephesus, to Philemon and to Crete to represent Paul
3. Often when Tychicus is sent, it is for the express purpose of sharing Paul's experiences with those to whom he is sent - Tychicus is close enough to Paul that he can be a faithful representative from Paul

C. And Onesimus is a name we should all recognize - the escaped slave who met Paul and became a Christian

1. Onesimus' story can be found in Philemon, which we read this morning - he had run away from Philemon, his master, met Paul in prison and had become a devout believer in Jesus and a fellow worker with Paul
2. And Paul formed a very strong relationship with Onesimus, listen to what Paul writes in Philemon 10-12 - *I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.*
3. But Paul was sending Onesimus back because he needed to go repair another relationship, Philemon 13-16 - *I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back 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.*

D. So Tychicus and Onesimus represent Paul's current relationship with the church in Colossae and his desire to continue and deepen that relationship - he is sending those who are as his steward and his son to the Colossians

1. Paul isn't talking about the relationships of the gospel lightly or hypocritically - Paul is pursuing gospel relationships just as much as he is calling the church in Colossae to gospel relationships
2. This record of Tychicus and Onesimus should strengthen our understanding and our passion for pursuing Paul's instructions about relationships in Colossians - Paul believed what he wrote and he lived what he wrote
3. If Paul can part with his trusted servant and one who became like a son to him, and if a runaway slave under the sentence of death can reconcile with a hostile master can't you live for Christ in your family and in your church?
4. Paul loved gospel relationships and we should too - let's pursue each other within this local church and rejoice in the commands that Paul has given us to pursue Christ-honoring relationships

III. Recommending Examples

A. As Paul continues on, he records greetings from six men who were with him: Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas

1. Colossians 4:10-14 - *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), 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. 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. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.*
2. As I've meditated on these greetings, I realized that these men represent things that Paul has been talking about in his letter - these men act as examples of those who lived out Paul's instructions

B. Men who completely rooted all of their hope in the gospel, even to the point of suffering

1. Paul had encouraged the Colossians to "*continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard*"
2. And then Paul immediately follows his command up with evidence that he has rooted all of his hope in the gospel, Colossians 1:23-25 - *if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,*
3. Paul rejoiced in the hope of the gospel so much that he was willing to suffer to see the gospel grow - and now Paul is sending greetings from men who were like this
4. Aristarchus was from Macedonia but began travelling with Paul and soon after got dragged into an angry mob in Ephesus, but that didn't turn him away - in fact, like Tychicus, he became one of Paul's travelling companions during the collections for the Jerusalem Church - and then Aristarchus continued with Paul through his arrest in Rome, boarded the fateful boat in Crete and arrived with Paul in Rome and even imprisonment with Paul in Rome didn't turn him away - Aristarchus loved the gospel and was willing to suffer anything to pursue it - His hope was in Jesus Christ
5. And we don't know much about Jesus Justus, in fact, I know nothing about him except that he was a fellow Jew with Paul and was willing to devote Himself to pursuing the kingdom of God - something that wasn't so popular among Jews back then - whoever he was, Jesus Justus was willing to face ridicule, persecution, and imprisonment for the sake of the Kingdom of God, he loved the gospel and was willing to suffer for it - His hope was in Jesus Christ
6. So the Colossians could look at these men and say "this is what it means to continue in the gospel, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel; this is what it means that our hope is in Jesus Christ."

C. Men who devoted themselves to the Word of God and prayer

1. Paul had encouraged the Colossians to "*let the Word of Christ dwell richly in you, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom*" and "*to continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving*"
2. And Paul sends greetings from two men who diligently pursued these things
3. First, Epaphras - *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.* - Epaphras was from Colossae and had been the missionary who had brought the gospel to Colossae, and now having been sent back to Paul in Rome he appears to have joined Paul in prison - but that didn't stop Epaphras' work for the gospel because he devoted himself to prayer, he continued steadfastly in prayer to the point where Paul could describe it as always struggling on your behalf in prayer - Epaphras lived out Paul's exhortation on prayer
4. And then Luke - *Luke the beloved physician greets you,* - Paul doesn't say much about Luke, but we know what Luke devoted Himself to, he listened to the message about Christ, he travelled with Paul, sat at Paul's feet and learned the gospel, then he travelled to search out the truth of the gospel for himself and then recorded it all for us - He loved the Word of Christ and pursued it with all his effort to the point where his pursuit of the Word of Christ was recorded for us as the Word of Christ - Luke lived out Paul's exhortation on Scripture
5. So the Colossians could look at these men and say "this is what it means to let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us and to continue steadfastly in prayer; this is what it means to love the things of Christ."

D. Men who lived out patience and forgiveness

1. Paul had encouraged the Colossians to live out the attitudes of Christ toward one another, including "*bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.*"
2. Mark is an interesting character in the New Testament - he was an early believer in Jerusalem and may have even met Jesus and he became an early participant in the first missionary journeys with Paul and Barnabas, but something went wrong and Mark turned back which set Paul against him and eventually wore away at Paul and Barnabas' relationship - the Scripture never really tells us who was right and who was wrong in this situation, but multiple broken relationships had occurred which involved Paul
3. So when Mark is mentioned in Colossians as being with Paul again, this is a big deal - a broken relationship had been restored - either Mark or Paul, or maybe both of them, had had the opportunity to practice bearing with each other, patience and forgiveness which had led to reconciled relationships
4. Paul wasn't immune to the struggles he was addressing in his letters but Paul did live out the exhortations of his letters and pursued Christ-honoring relationships even in broken relationships so that at the end of his life Paul could say that Mark had been very useful to him
5. So the Colossians could look at Mark and say "this is what it means to bear with one another and forgive one another; this is what it means to put on Christ."

E. Men who demonstrated the danger of ignoring Paul's warning

1. Paul's main warning in Colossians was "*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*"
2. Paul didn't want them to lose their taste for the savor of the gospel and get distracted by worldly things, get lured by worldly arguments and cease being stable and steadfast in the gospel
3. So enter Demas - Demas is an interesting character across the pages of the New Testament - he apparently was with Paul, perhaps even serving Paul, during his imprisonment in Rome and he gets a positive mention in Colossians and Philemon - when Colossians was written, Demas appeared to be a Mark, or Aristarchus, or Epaphras or Luke
4. But something went wrong along the way and Paul records one of the saddest verses in the New Testament about Demas, II Timothy 4:9-10 - *Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.*
5. Demas decided that the gospel wasn't worth the cost, he decided to take hold of the plow and then turn back, he got lured by the philosophies of this world and he left Paul, and in effect, he left the gospel
6. And we shouldn't minimize the terror of Paul's words about Demas - we should remember what James said "*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*" or what John said "*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" - being in love with this present world was condemnation for Demas
7. Now I'm not saying I know how Demas' story ended, but we aren't left with a lot of hope - Demas loved the world and walked away from the gospel, he is a living testament to Paul's warning to the Colossians, it is possible to appear to love the gospel but lack foundations, it is possible to cease being stable in the gospel when trouble comes
8. I don't know if the Colossians would have seen this, but Demas should stand as a warning to us - heed the exhortations of this book or you could be like Demas, you could be drawn away by the things of this world
9. So be diligent to see and to keep seeing how glorious Jesus is, be diligent to make Him all your hope and all your joy and all your wisdom, don't let the hopes and pursuits and wisdoms of this world creep in and slowly push Him away
10. Because it is possible for you to sit here now, to participate at the Lord's Table and to appear to all of us to be true believers and then in five years from now to walk away from Christ
11. The warnings in Scripture are important and they are meant to keep you here - it is possible for you to turn away, so listen, take heed, and embrace Christ

IV. Read and Respond!

A. As Paul finishes his final greetings, he turns from sending greetings from those with him to greeting those whom he is writing to, primarily the two churches that Paul has in mind while writing this letter

1. Colossian 4:15-17 - *Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 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. And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."*

B. In these greetings, we can see Paul's heart for local churches

1. Paul greeted individual churches - the church at Colossae, the church at Laodicea, and the church that met in Nympha's house
2. He loved each of these churches and wanted each of them to grow in the instructions contained in His book

C. In these greetings we can also see Paul's longing for churches to participate together in Christ

1. Paul loves local churches, but he also assumes local churches will be working together
2. He identifies three local churches here and then calls on them to greet each other, to share Paul's letters with each other, in sum to pursue Christ together
3. Local churches are infinitely important, but they are the end of Christ's kingdom - Paul would have us pursue other local churches around us to work together for the kingdom of Christ

D. But primarily in these greetings we can see Paul's desire for people to read his letters as Scripture

1. He wanted this book to be read in Colossae and then to be read in Laodicea in the church
2. That command was marking it off as Scripture - the Scriptures should be read in the church as they had been read in the synagogue for centuries before - and Paul is saying that his letter warrants that
3. Paul wants believers to read this book, to listen to his exhortations and to respond to his teaching
4. And now this book has reached beyond the Colossians, beyond the Laodiceans, all the way to us - we've read it, we've studied it, and now it's up to us, what will we do with it

E. But what does Paul's cryptic message to Archippus have to do with this?

1. Archippus is another character that we don't know much about - there are several theories, maybe he was Philemon's son, maybe he was a pastor in Colossae or in Laodicea?
2. I lean toward he was a pastor in Colossae based on some similarities between how Paul addresses him in Philemon and his exhortation in Colossians to things Paul says to Timothy in I and II Timothy - maybe he was also Philemon's son, I don't know
3. But if Archippus was a pastor/elder in Colossae then Paul's final exhortation is a call for an elder to exhort and encourage the things of Colossians in the church and a call for the church to encourage their elder as he pursues these things
4. "Archippus, be faithful to your ministry. Take these things and apply them to your church. Help your church see how great Jesus is. And church, help Archippus apply these things to your church. Encourage him as he attempts to teach and encourage these things and follow his lead. Tell him to keep being faithful to his ministry."
5. We should work together as a local church under the teaching of the elders to apply these things to our local church - I rejoice that many of the exhortations in Colossians are lived out in our church, but we can always pursue more - we can always see more of Jesus' glory and we can always put on more of Jesus' righteousness and live more like Jesus to each other, so let's do that together