

BEHIND THE BOOK

Connecting to the Bible (Observation)

COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

(READ VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS)

AUGUST 30, 2017

Similar to the end of Romans, Paul closes Colossians with a verbal group photograph offering the names of eight people who have supported him during his imprisonment; a Roman “board of directors’ who have enabled him to conduct his life and ministry.

Our triune God serves as the model for living in community. It was “not good” for Adam to be alone and it is best for us to be surrounded by like-minded and like-hearted people.

Throughout Scripture, God exposed the weaknesses of his greatest leaders so that they might know the glory and strength was his and that, as Paul did, they might receive encouragement from other members of the body.

Exodus 17:8-13 - ⁸ *Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.* ⁹ *So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”* ¹⁰ *So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.* ¹¹ *Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.* ¹² *But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.* ¹³ *And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.*

Numbers 11:16-17 - ¹⁶ *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.”* ¹⁷ *And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.*

Proverbs 27:17 – *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - ⁹ *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

Paul ministered alone only once. Barnabas brought him into the church and thereafter Paul always had traveling companions who strengthened him and who he mentored. The only time Paul ministered alone was in Athens (Acts 17) and the result is spoken of in 1 Corinthians –

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 - *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men^[c] but in the power of God.*

First: Tychicus and the Servant's Heart 7-8

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant^[b] in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,

Tychicus = fortunate

He is mentioned 5 times in the NT

In Acts 20, Paul was in Ephesus at the end of his 3rd missionary journey. He planned to return to Jerusalem via Macedonia, Galatia and Achaia specifically, to collect an offering for the churches in Jerusalem.

Paul intended the offering to cement the bond of fellowship between the predominately Jewish Jerusalem church and the predominately Gentile Macedonian (Asia Minor) churches.

He also planned to take some Gentile believers from Greece and Asia Minor to Jerusalem with him and Tychicus was among that group.

Acts 20:1-6 - *After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. ² When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. ³ There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews^[a] as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. ⁵ These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, ⁶ but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.*

When Paul wrote Colossians, he had been in house arrest for two years. He had survived a Jewish plot to murder him, trials before Felix, Festus, Agrippa and a difficult voyage to Rome. There, Tychicus made his way to Paul with news about the heresy and division in the church at Colossae.

In return, Paul asks Tychicus to take his letter to the Colossians and probably Ephesians. He also travelled with Onesimus on his return trip to Philemon where Tychicus undoubtedly authenticated Paul's letter and appeal.

- c. A.D. 6** Born a Roman citizen to Jewish parents in Tarsus (in modern eastern Turkey)
- c. 20–30** Studies Torah in Jerusalem with Gamaliel; becomes a Pharisee
- c. 30–33** Persecutes followers of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem and Judea
- c. 33–36** Converted on the way to Damascus; spends three years in Arabia; returns to Damascus to preach Jesus as Messiah
- c. 36** Flees Damascus because of persecution; visits Jerusalem and meets with the apostles
- 36–44** Preaches in Tarsus and surrounding region
- 44–46** Invited by Barnabas to teach in Antioch
- 46** With Barnabas visits Jerusalem to bring a famine relief offering
- 47–48** First missionary journey with Barnabas, to Cyprus and Galatia
- 49** At the Council of Jerusalem, Paul argues successfully that Gentile Christians need not follow Jewish law; returns to Antioch; confronts Peter over question of Jewish law
- 49–52** Second missionary journey with Silas, through Asia Minor and Greece; settles in Corinth; writes letters to Thessalonians
- 52** Visits Jerusalem and Antioch briefly; begins third missionary journey
- 52–55** Stays in Ephesus; writes the letters to Galatians and Corinthians
- 55–57** Travels through Greece and possibly Illyricum (modern Yugoslavia); writes letter to Romans
- 57–59** Returns to Jerusalem and arrested; imprisoned at Caesarea
- 59–60** Appears before Festus and appeals to Caesar; voyage to Rome
- 60–62** Under house arrest at Rome; writes letters to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon
- 62–64** Released; journeys to Spain?; writes letters to Timothy and Titus
- 64** - Returns to Rome; martyred during persecution

After Paul's release from house arrest, Tychicus remained with him.

When Paul needed a temporary replacement for Titus in Crete, Tychicus was considered for the job.

Titus 3:12 - When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

When Paul was imprisoned in Rome for the second time, this time in the mamertine prison but Tychicus was still with him.

The mamertine prison is situated near the law courts in Rome. It was originally created as a cistern for a spring and prisoners were lowered through an opening into the lower dungeon. The prison was used for short-term purposes only as prisoners awaited execution. (Read the Wikipedia account for pictures and more information)

Paul wanted to see Timothy and sent Tychicus to serve as Timothy's temporary replacement.

2 Timothy 4:12 - *Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹² Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.*

For Paul, Tychicus is a:

- a) Beloved brother
- b) Faithful minister

It appears the recognition as "faithful" is Paul's highest commendation

1 Corinthians 4:2 - *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.*

- c) Fellow servant

As such, he will not only deliver the letter to the Colossians and the Laodiceans but will also update the church on Paul's affairs.

Second: Onesimus and his Past 9

and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.

Onesimus was a slave of Philemon's who had stolen from his master and run away. Paul encountered Onesimus in the court system in Rome. Under Paul's influence, Onesimus became a Christian. His return to Colossae and Philemon as a brother is the occasion for the letter of Philemon. Paul wrote to Philemon asking that he forgive Onesimus and welcome him as a brother in Christ.

We have every reason to believe Philemon did just that. Christian history records Philemon as a "holy apostle" who, along with Apphia, Archippus and Onesimus, was martyred in Colossae during the same first wave of Neronian persecution that martyred Paul in approximately 64 AD.

Third: Aristarchus and his heart 10a

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you,

Aristarchus was a Jewish believer (4:11) even though he had a Greek name.

He was a native of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2) and first appears in Scripture as one of Paul's companions during the riot at Ephesus (Acts 17f). He accompanied Paul on his return trip to Jerusalem with the offering (Acts 20:4) and on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:4).

"fellow prisoner" = *aichmalotos* = one caught with a spear. It refers to war captives. Since Paul was a Roman and, to our knowledge, the only one under actual Roman arrest, it is unlikely that Aristarchus was an official prisoner but Paul refers to him as such because he was with Paul in his prison experience.

Aristarchus surrendered his freedom and became a prisoner for Paul's sake just as Paul had surrendered his freedom and become a prisoner for Jesus' sake.

Fourth: John Mark and his restoration 10b

John Mark's ministry path was much different than that of Tychicus or Aristarchus, even than that of Onesimus.

Barnabas' cousin, he accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13) but for reasons Paul does not explain, John Mark abandoned the mission.

Acts 13:13 - Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,

Mark's desertion later became a source of friction between Paul and Barnabas. On their second missionary journey Barnabas wanted to take his cousin but Paul refused to trust John Mark with the opportunity. Eventually, Paul and Barnabas decided to take separate journeys.

Acts 15:37-39 - Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,

Fortunately, John Mark's story does not end there. By the time Paul wrote Colossians, the young disciple had proven himself worthy of trust, perhaps through the ministry of Peter, himself the benefactor of second chances.

1 Peter 5:13 - She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.

In Philemon 24, Paul names Philemon as a great help to him.

Philemon 23-24 - Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

In 2 Timothy, Paul encouraged Timothy to

2 Timothy 4:9-11 - *Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia,^[b] Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*

Colossians 4:10b - *Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),*

Perhaps most importantly, Mark was Peter's scribe for the gospel that bears his name.

Fifth: Epaphras and his commitment 12-13

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. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

Epaphras was the founder of the Colossian church and was most likely its current pastor when Paul wrote his letter.

Like Tychicus, he brought the news to Paul about the Colossian heresy.

Like Tychicus, he and Paul are designated as a *doulos* (bondslave)

Laboring = agonizomai = agonize

1 Corinthians 9:25 - *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.*

John 18:36 - *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*

Romans 15:30 - *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,*

The goal of Epaphras' prayer ministry for them was that they "*stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God...*"

Mature = fully developed

Fully assured = plerophoreo = persuaded or satisfied fully

Sixth: Luke and his Medicine 14a

Luke the beloved physician greets you,

Luke was Paul's personal physician as well as his close friend and comrade in ministry. He was a Gentile believer (4:11) who travelled frequently with Paul on his journeys.

Luke is mentioned only two other times in the New Testament; all three times he appears is by Paul's writing from Prison (Phil 24; 2 Tim 4:11).

After joining Paul on his 2nd missionary journey, Luke was with Paul for the remainder of his life.

You can see where Luke is in Acts by the personal pronoun "we"

Luke was the author of the gospel bearing his name and the book of Acts.

Seventh: Demas and his testimony 4:14b

as does Demas.

The last man in Paul's photograph is the 'fly in the ointment.'

Demas was with Paul during both of his imprisonments and his commitment to the ministry had been substantial. But Paul records

2 Timothy 4:9-10 - Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia

Eventually, Demas abandoned Paul, the ministry and Christianity.

*Matthew 6:24 - No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and **love** the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*

NOTE: If the two greatest leaders in Christianity, Jesus and Paul, were betrayed and abandoned by two of their closest followers, we must expect believers in our world to depart from the faith also.

Eighth: Concluding Remarks 15-18

¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers^[c] at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

The note about “*Nympha and the church in her house*” could be the church in Laodicea or Hierapolis. That the church could fit in Nympha’s house reminds us how fledgling the church was even at the close of Paul’s ministry.

Romans 16:3-5 - *Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house.*

Paul closes the letter with greetings to the church in Laodicea and an encouragement for the Colossians to share their letter with them while reading the letter Paul sent to Laodicea.

Conclusion:

Paul concludes his letter to the Colossians with a snapshot of people who are faithful to the gospel. Perhaps this was a reminder that, in the midst of the Gentile and Jewish false teachers in the church at Colossae, there were people who faithfully represented the gospel. This is a great encouragement to us also.

In the end, Paul is reminding the Colossians that salvation is by grace through faith and not works as falsely advocated by faithless teachers in Colossae.

Small Group Interaction:

1 – What might Paul’s group photo of faithful people tell us about how we should live our lives?

2 – How does “iron sharpen iron?”

3 – How are “two better than one?”

4 – What community are we living in? Who is sharpening us and whom are we sharpening to receive the benefit of “two” over “one?”

5 – What is Paul’s highest commendation? “faithful.”

6 – Tell Onesimus’ story.

7 – How does the story of John Mark encourage us?

8 – What does the term “agonize” say about ministry? About life?

9 – What happened to Demas?

10 – How can you keep this from happening to you?

11 – What can the fledgling size of the churches Paul founded tell us about ministry in the 21st century?

12 – How does Paul hope this closing snapshot will encourage the churches?

Behind the Book is only one aspect of Heritage's teaching ministry which seeks to employ our church's mission statement: *Connecting to God, Growing with Others and Impacting the world*. On Wednesday evenings we **connect** to Sunday morning's Bible passage and discover what it says through in-depth Bible study. Sunday morning in corporate worship (9:30am) we **grow** from the passage by learning what it means for our daily living. In Community Groups (10:45am) we practically apply the text, being impacted by it and learning to **impact** the world with it. **CGI** provides a balanced approach to life and Bible study; an upward look (Connect), an inward look (Grow) and an outward look (Impact) ensuring that our mission fulfils our vision to be a **God-centered, Great Commission** congregation. It's a well-known and beneficial way to approach the Bible – *Connect/Observation, Grow/Interpretation, Impact/Application*. It's also a Trinitarian approach to Scripture: Connecting to the Father, Growing in Christ and Impacting the world by the Spirit, so that the way we study the Bible daily reminds us about who our God is and how he is unique among all religions of the world.

