

Horsley Evangelical Church ([www.horsleyec.org.uk](http://www.horsleyec.org.uk))

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### Colossians 4:7-18 You'll never walk alone.

If we are tempted to think of Paul writing this letter all alone in some prison cell, these final words reveal a very different picture! For Paul mentions no less than eight companions and fellow workers who were in some way 'with him' when he was under house arrest in Rome. And it reminds us of the mercy and kindness of God to Paul, for the Lord provided a measure of support for his servant in all the suffering he had to bear. But it also reminds us of the greatness of the gospel cause which Paul and others were caught up with.

Actually, God has more servants and workers around the world than we realize. Many of these gospel workers are hidden and to some extent under cover. But just as Elisha once prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened to see that those who are with us are far more than those who are against us, so too we must never imagine that the cause of God is lacking in supporters. The work of the gospel is the greatest in all the world and God himself recruits his workers as he sees fit.

And these final verses of the letter reveal to the Colossians what true Christianity is like in action. The people mentioned come from very different backgrounds and walks of life, and yet they are united in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a strong and miraculous fellowship between them for they are all motivated by love for Christ - and they work very hard. And if the great theme of this letter is *the fullness and freedom that the believer has in Christ* then this final section gives an illustration of what that looks like. We have been given a new *freedom* to serve the Lord with our lives and at the same time we have a new *fullness* of knowing and loving the God whom we serve.

So let's meet some of the people who were with Paul at that time and who we will be with one day in heaven. First we are introduced to **those who carried the letter**. The postmen were called Tychicus and Onesimus. [Read verses 7-9](#). From other verses in the New Testament, we know that Tychicus was from the province of Asia and a frequent traveling companion of Paul in the gospel work. Paul also sent Tychicus as his representative to churches he was personally unable to visit.

Paul describes him here in verse 7 as a *dear brother* – a fellow believer in the Lord Jesus whom Paul greatly loved and valued. He was a *faithful minister* - someone Paul could rely on. And he was also a *fellow servant* of the Lord Jesus. Tychicus was not a servant of Paul, he was a servant of Christ – just as we all are.

Then there was Onesimus. We know from the New Testament *letter to Philemon* that Onesimus was a runaway slave from Colosse. He stole from his master Philemon and then ran away. But at some point the runaway slave had met the apostle Paul and was converted to Christ. And yet Paul mentions none of this because it no longer describes Onesimus as he really is. Rather, Onesimus is *our faithful and dear brother* (9).

And in his hand, Onesimus carried not only this letter to the Colossians but also the letter that we describe as *Paul's letter to Philemon*. In that letter, Paul asks the master Philemon to take his servant Onesimus back and forgive him. The runaway slave has been persuaded to return to his master and face the music. But he does so now as a Christian. And of course Onesimus had Tychicus with him, to vouch for him and support him as he goes back to his master's house.

But as well as being the carriers of these letters (Colossians and Philemon) the men are sent by Paul with another task. They are to tell the Colossians all about Paul's circumstances. They are to tell the church in Colosse everything that is happening around Paul and encourage their hearts.

Paul wanted the church in Colosse to know all about him so that he could develop his relationship with them. In any relationship, there has to be a *sharing* on both sides. No doubt Paul hopes that the church will pray for him with this information. But he also wants the church in Colosse to remember what real Christianity is like in action. For the background to this letter is that strange teaching has taken the Colossians' eyes off Christ. And they need reminding of what real Christian fellowship looks like. It's about sharing our lives with each other. And God has given us one another so that we may serve him together in the work of the gospel and encourage one another to keep on keeping on.

Then in verses 10 -14 Paul mentions **those who send greetings** to the church at Colosse. For these are Christians with Paul who know something about the church in Colosse and take a prayerful interest in them. First Paul mentions three Jewish converts to Christ who send greetings. [Read verse 10, 11](#). From other Scriptures, we know that Aristarchus was a Jew who lived in Macedonia. He had been with Paul during the riot in Ephesus and had travelled with him to Greece and then on to Rome. Paul describes him here as his 'fellow prisoner'. Perhaps Archippus was also under house arrest like Paul. Or some think that he was effectively a prisoner because of his commitment to help Paul for the sake of Christ. Whatever the truth, Archippus was a man who was willing to give up privileges he had in order to suffer for Christ and his kingdom.

We know less about the man described as 'Jesus called Justus' – except Paul implies that he too had forsaken his Jewish privileges for the sake of the kingdom of God. 'Jesus' was a fairly common Jewish name, but this man had given it up to adopt a Greek name 'Justus' - not just out of reverence for the name of the Lord Jesus, but probably as a sign that he too had given up certain privileges as a Jew for the kingdom of God.

Then there is Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. We know a lot more about him from the book of Acts. We know that Mark had accompanied Paul and Mark's cousin Barnabas on what we call *the second missionary journey*. However Mark had deserted them for some reason at Pamphylia. On a later missionary trip Paul was then unwilling to take Mark along whereas Mark's cousin Barnabas thought they *should* take him along. And Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement about whether to take Mark along that they parted company. [Read Acts 15:36 – 41](#).

Actually, it meant that the work of the gospel multiplied – God used it for good. But here we discover that Paul's relationship with Mark has been restored – and so had Mark's usefulness and faithfulness as a Christian worker. It's interesting that when he writes to Timothy at the end of his life, Paul values and loves Mark so much that he requests Mark be sent to him in his final days. But look again at what Paul says here. [Read 10](#). We don't know what 'instructions' the Colossians had been given about Mark. But Paul certainly underlines that he should be welcomed.

Perhaps these three Jewish brothers would remind the Colossians to be humble before one another in their present difficulties. Perhaps mentioning Mark would also encourage them if they had had sharp disagreements recently about certain things. Relationships may be strained. But relationships within the kingdom should be healed, for Jesus' sake.

But the greetings sent to the Colossians continue. [Read verses 12-14](#). Here then are greetings sent to the church by Gentile companions of Paul. The first of them the Colossians knew very well – Epaphras. Epaphras was one of them – he was part of the church in the city of Colosse. Indeed, under God,

Epaphras was the one who brought the gospel to Colosse and to the neighbouring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

How does Paul describe Epaphras? He is *a servant of Christ Jesus*. The focus of this whole letter has been on the person of the Lord Jesus. Colossian eyes had been taken off Christ. But Epaphras, who is one of them, continues to be *a servant of Christ Jesus*. But how is he spending his time in Rome? Paul tells the church that Epaphras is always wrestling in prayer for them, that they may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

The church would know the story of Jacob who wrestled with God for a whole night in prayer. But Epaphras was a man who wrestled in prayer with God every day for the church he loved. Such was his concern over what had happened, and such was his love for the Lord that he wrestled in prayer that the Lord would bring his people through these present difficulties. He prayed that they would reach maturity and full assurance of faith - for they were still a young church. But Epaphras prayed that the Lord would keep them and make them wise and steadfast.

And then a very interesting and important verse. [Read verse 13 again](#). Paul testifies that Epaphras is *working hard* for the three churches in the Lycus valley. I don't know how you would describe prayer. But Paul describes it here as *work* – as hard work. The word he uses means *agonise* or *toil*. It's the same word that the Gospel writers use to describe the praying of the Lord Jesus on the night he prayed in Gethsemane. His prayer was so intense that his sweat was like drops of blood.

Prayer is work. It takes effort – real effort. It's the very last thing that the devil wants the saint to do, and it's often the last thing our sinful nature wants to do – that's why it is *so* hard. It's a struggle. But praying is as much *work* as any other activity in gospel proclamation. Sometimes we neglect prayer because we feel we need to do something. But real prayer *is* doing something. Indeed, some describe it as the *real work*. For whatever the mysterious connection is, the work of the Lord will not go ahead without the work (and toil) of prayer. Very often it's a hidden work – much of what Epaphras did was on his own and in secret, although of course prayer is also an activity that we can do together. But it is an immensely important work.

That comment should encourage the Colossians to persevere in prayer and to devote themselves to prayer (4:2). It should remind them too of the battle they are presently in and that none of them had 'spiritually arrived' – none of us have. It would also remind them of the love of Epaphras.

But there are two more Gentile greetings given here. [Read verse 14 again](#). This is the only place where we learn that Luke, the writer of the Gospel and the book of the Acts of the Apostles, was in fact a medical doctor. But Luke was also an evangelist and a great supporter of Paul in the work. Does this mean that Luke cared for Paul's medical needs? I'm sure it does. He was a dear friend – Dr Luke. And then there is Demas. Some point out that of all the people mentioned here, nothing by way of commendation is said about Demas. Was that deliberate? We know from Paul's second letter to Timothy that Demas, because he loved this world, later deserted Paul. We know nothing more about Demas. And yet we do remember that Mark once deserted – and yet the Lord restored him. It's a reminder to us all to be alert and keep watch. Our enemy prowls around looking for someone to devour. Resist him and stand firm in the faith.

Then thirdly, Paul sends **instructions to others**. [Read verse 15-17](#). Paul encourages fellowship between the church at Colosse and the nearby church at Laodicea. He instructs the Colossians to give his greetings to the church at Laodicea when they next meet. He then instructs that this letter be read in their church too. That could simply remind us that the truths Paul wrote in this letter concerning the person of Christ and the way to live for him are relevant for every church. It's God's truth which is unchanging. But

it could also imply that the church at Laodicea was also struggling with the same teaching that the Colossians were dealing with. Paul's comment also encourages the churches to support one another.

The church at Laodicea met in a house (as most churches did in those days) and it would seem that the name of the women in whose house they met was Nympha. Perhaps like Lydia, who was a dealer in purple cloth from Philippi, Nympha also was wealthy and had a house which was large enough to accommodate all the believers in Laodicea. But Paul asks the Colossians to especially greet her for her kindness and service to the saints.

But then, just as this letter was to be read (and probably copied) to the Laodiceans, Paul instructs that the letter he had sent to the Laodiceans should also be read (and probably copied) to Colosse. Perhaps it was a letter we no longer have, although a few people make out a case that this other letter which the Laodiceans had received was what we call *Paul's letter to the Ephesians*. It was a circular letter. The simple truth is - we don't know. But of course in this way, the New Testament letters were shared around the churches and copied as the Holy Spirit convinced the churches of their worth and indeed of their inspiration. And how we thank God that he has preserved copies for us today.

Then there is Archippus. [Read verse 17 again](#). It should be read as a *greeting* rather than a scolding. We do not know what work the Lord had given Archippus - whether he had been commissioned by Paul or whether Paul simply knew about it. But we do know that Paul encourages him to finish the work and complete it. There is always work the Lord has for us to do - that is why we are still on the earth. And our prayer for ourselves and others is that the Lord will help us to *complete the work* he has given us to do. For we all want to hear the words from the Master, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter now into your Master's happiness."

And so we come to **Paul's personal note** where he signs off the letter. [Read verse 18](#). Paul's usual custom was to dictate his letters to a secretary. But he often signed off his letters with a personal note. Perhaps this was primarily to guarantee the genuineness of the letters. Some think that Paul's eyesight wasn't too good, in which case his writing would have been larger than that of the secretary.

But Paul finally greets the church personally. He has already assured them of his love for them in the Lord. But now he asks them to *remember his chains*. Perhaps Paul is referring generally to his sufferings and difficulties. "Pray for me" he asks. "Things are not easy - indeed they can be very difficult. Pray for me in my chains." And then Paul ends the letter in much the same way as he began - with God's grace. At the beginning he greeted them with the words, "grace and peace to you from God our Father". And now he ends with 'grace'. "Grace be with you".

How vital is God's grace to us - his kindness and undeserved favour. We are saved by grace and kept by grace. Although some think that Paul is really praying at this point that the Lord Jesus, who is *the embodiment of grace* and who is *full of grace and truth* might draw near to these people. Certainly, the focus throughout has been on Christ.

One commentator finishes with these words - "So as Paul says farewell to us, we need remember his fetters no more, for they have long since rusted away. But we do remember his encouragement to us, that in Christ Jesus we may enjoy fullness of life and freedom, and his exhortation to us to fulfil any ministry that we may have received while there is yet time." Well, may the Lord bless us all through this precious letter.