

The Fellowship of the Gospel Colossians 4:7-18

Intro:

- **Paul's final greetings at the end of his letters are always interesting passages.** Sometimes they are short and sweet and sometimes they are more detailed. The one we have in Colossians is one of his longer final greetings. The tendency with a final greeting might be to just read it as Paul closing out the letter and miss that this is still Scripture and all Scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, we can be certain that even the greeting is significant.
- **I want to show you something about the nature of Biblical literature as we prepare to examine the Paul's greeting.** When you read the Bible there are two kinds of texts: *prescriptive texts and descriptive texts*.
 - **Prescriptive Texts:** Prescriptive texts tell us what to do. Most of Colossians is prescriptive. It is full of exhortations and commands. With a prescriptive text you ask the question: what is commanded or instructed?
 - **Descriptive Texts:** Descriptive texts simply tell us what is happening. It is a narrative. It is telling a story. So we ask from the story: what can I learn from this narrative? What are the examples? What are the principles?
 - **Most of the Bible is descriptive.** It is telling stories. The Bible is not simply an instruction manual for life. It is not telling me how to have my best life now or how to fix my car or computer?
 - **God knows we don't only learn through receiving information.** We also learn through stories, narratives. These stories give us a picture of what to do, how to live or give us an example to follow or what not to do.
 - **What we are looking at in Paul's final greeting is a descriptive text.** So we are asking the question: what are the examples to consider? What are the principles that apply? And because all Scripture is breathed out by God it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in all righteousness.
- **Main Point: Fellowship in the gospel sends us on mission with the gospel.**
- **The points of the sermon are really questions to help us walk through the text.**
 1. **Examination:** Who did Paul mention and how did he describe them?
 2. **Application:** What does this text say about the fellowship of the Gospel?

I. Who did Paul mention and how did he describe them?

- We will walk through the content of vv. 7-18 and then I will make observations and application in the second point.

A. The Fellowship of the Letter: Tychicus and Onesimus (vv. 7-9)

- **Illst:** Tychicus and Onesimus are like Frodo and Sam from Lord Of The Rings . . .
- **Tychicus:** Tychicus joined up with Paul in Greece on the latter part of Paul's third missionary journey. On Paul's mission team he was most likely the one who relayed letters and supplies for Paul. He took contributions to Judea and brought relief to Titus in Crete. He delivered letters to the Colossian church, Philemon, the Ephesian church and he most likely delivered Paul's second letter to Timothy. Tychicus is highly praised by Paul. The letter was his burden to bear.

Notice how Paul describes him in vv. 7-8. He is:

- *A beloved brother*
- *A faithful minister*
- *A fellow servant in the Lord*
- He was sent that he may encourage the Colossian church

- **His traveling companion was Onesimus:** He was a runaway slave. His name means "*useful*." He is indeed now useful because as he ran away to Rome to most likely get lost in the crowd, Jesus finds him and saves him. He finds Paul and now Paul sends him back to Philemon in the company of Tychicus. Paul urged Philemon to receive Onesimus back not as a slave but as a beloved brother. **Which is how Paul describes him:**
 - *A faithful brother*
 - *A beloved brother*
 - *A comfort to me* (**Colossians 4:11** is for all in that group)
 - In Philemon Paul describes Onesimus as:
 - *He is useful to me* (v. 11)
 - *"I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart."* (v. 12)
 - *Beloved brother* (v. 16)
 - Paul obviously cared a great deal for Onesimus.
- These are the men who delivered Paul's letter to the church.

B. Band of Brothers: Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus-Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas (vv. 10-14)

- **Aristarchus:** Aristarchus was a Jewish convert who joined Paul at some point on his third missionary journey. He was a traveling companion and in Ephesus an unruly crowd roughed him up. Finally he became a "fellow-prisoner" with Paul in Rome. We do not know if this meant he was actually under house arrest with Paul or if this was metaphorical in that he was a "fellow-prisoner" and was a *comfort to Paul* (**Colossians 4:11** is for all in that group)
- **Mark:** Mark was the son of Mary (**Acts 12:12**) and the cousin of Barnabas (**Colossians 4:10**). He had started out with Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey (**Acts 13:5**), but along the way (at Perga in Pamphylia), he left them and returned to Jerusalem (**Acts 13:13**). It is clear that Paul felt abandoned by Mark and when it came time for Paul and Barnabas' second missionary journey Paul did not want Mark to accompany them. The disagreement came between the two friends so that they went their separate ways (**Acts 15:36-39**).

However, as time passes Paul feels differently about Mark. While he was imprisoned in Rome, Mark was with him as a "fellow-worker" (**Philemon 24**). Apparently Paul was planning to send Mark to Colossae and requested the brethren to "receive" him. The past was forgotten and Mark had proven himself to be faithful *a fellow worker for the kingdom of God* and a *comfort to Paul* (**Colossians 4:11**).

- **Jesus-Justus:** Not much is known about Justus. He was a Jewish co-worker with Paul in Rome. Like the rest of the Band of Brothers, he is a faithful *fellow worker for the kingdom of God* and a *comfort to Paul*. He was probably a missionary like Aristarchus and Mark.
- **Epaphras:** Epaphras was from Colossae. He is the one most likely who led many of the Colossian converts to Christ and planted the church. He was an evangelist, prayer warrior and a church planter. He is mentioned at the beginning of the letter and now at the end. He is the one who works hard for the Colossian believers by praying for them.
- **Luke:** Luke is probably the most familiar of Paul's mission team. After all he wrote a gospel that bears his name and he also wrote Acts, although he is not mentioned in Acts. He traveled with Paul and recorded the events of Paul's experiences and he most likely gave medical attention to Paul since he was a doctor. Paul calls him the *beloved physician*.

- **Demas:** Finally we have Demas. He is mentioned three times in Paul's letters. In **Philemon 24**, he is described as a *fellow-worker*. Then finally in **2 Timothy 4:10** we learn of Demas' final decision, "*For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.*" Scholars say that Paul's use of the Greek word for love (agape) in **2 Timothy 4:10** indicates that Demas' decision to abandon Paul and return to worldly living was a calculated, deliberate decision.

It causes us to ask, why would Demas leave Paul? Did Demas grow tired of giving so much of his time to the Lord? Did he resent the deprivation of income? Was he weary of an association with a prisoner? It is not fanciful to conclude that probably he finally tired of the sacrificial life, and so made a calculated decision to follow his heart back into the pleasures of that wicked era.

Demas is a sad case for we do not know if Demas ever returned to the Lord? We do not know but we have the account of one who not only left the ministry but left the Lord as well. It is heartbreaking when those who are on the frontlines of ministry are so beaten up and struggle so much that they abandon not just ministry but also their faith in Christ.

- **These are Paul's band of brothers.** They are men he has sent out to serve on behalf of the churches.

C. Church on the Rock: Colossae and Laodicea (vv. 15-17)

- **The brothers in Laodicea:** Paul sent his greetings not only to the church in **Colossae** but also to the brothers in Laodicea. He greeted them and wanted the letter he has sent to the Colossian church read in their church as well. Apparently Paul wrote a letter to the Laodicean church and wanted that letter read in the Colossian church. We do not have that letter. Since it has not survived over the years it seems the Lord did not want it found.
- **The church in Nympha's house:** We can conclude from this letter and the letter to Philemon that there were at least two house churches in Colossae. There was one in Philemon's house and one in Nympha's house.
- **Archippus:** Archippus received a charge from Paul to fulfill the ministry that has been given him by the Lord. Paul's ministry was not only to spread the gospel but to raise up leaders and exhort them.

II. What does this text say about the fellowship of the Gospel?

- In a descriptive text like this, where Paul is making commendations of those he works with, we are seeing how the gospel has changed the lives of those men, women and how it is working itself out in the church. As Paul said in **Colossians 1** the gospel is growing and bearing fruit in the church and in the lives of his mission team. Paul sees it. It blesses him and he commends his team and the church for the evidence of the gospel in their lives.
- **First let's remind ourselves from Colossians of gospel growth.**
 - As we conclude this letter it is appropriate for us to remind ourselves of what the gospel has created in this church. This is what has happened. God, by the gospel of Jesus Christ, has spoken and by His word, the gospel, He has created His church in the city of Colossians. He called His people into existence from nothing and it grew and spread.
[Colossians 1:3-8]
- **Second, let's remind ourselves of the gospel.**
 - By the gospel God has created His people, He called them into existence, let's remind ourselves of how He did it.
Colossians 1:13-23 . . .
 - The gospel, the person and work of Jesus Christ proclaimed, creates the church.
- **Third, because of who they were, Paul exhorted them to live a certain way:**
 - **Colossians 2:6-7**

- **Colossians 3:1-4**
- **Fourth, those who are disciples of Christ are the *fellowship of the gospel*.** They are believers in Jesus and because of the work of the gospel certain characteristics are evident in their lives. The gospel has created and impacted their lives in such a way that they cannot remain the same. There is gospel affect and effect in their lives. We do not know the gospel stories behind their lives of those in Paul's posse. If we heard them we would be amazed. However, what we do see is the effect of Christ on their lives after they believed the gospel. There was a change; there was a calling. Let me make seven quick applications from how Paul described them.

1) **The call of the gospel creates gospel fellowship**

- **Verse 7:** Tychicus was a "**fellow servant**."
- **Verse 8:** Onesimus, of Onesimus Paul said "**with him**." This little phrase **with him** lumped Onesimus into the fellowship Paul was speaking of.
- **Verse 10:** Aristarchus, he was a "**fellow prisoner**."
- **Verse 11:** Jesus-Justus was a "**fellow worker**."
- **There is a fellowship that is created by the call to the gospel that is unique.** I remember my pastor in Texas always making a corny joke about the word *fellowship*. Steve, in his Tim Young joking kind of way, would say, "*Do you know what fellowship is? Fellowship is two fellas in the same ship.*" His point was this. We are in this ship together and we can sink it or we can work together to go together to the destination that we all as Christians need to be headed.
- **Paul's posse was working together to spread a passion for Christ.** They were centering on the gospel.
- **The call of the gospel does not simply create fellowship but it creates family.** This is my second application.

2) **The call of the gospel creates gospel family**

- **Verse 7:** Tychicus is a "**beloved brother**."
- **Verse 9:** Onesimus is a "**faithful and beloved brother**."
- **Verse 15:** Paul's greeting to the church in Laodicea and to Nympha's house church in Colossae, which by the way Paul had never met them, was a **familial** greeting.
- **The gospel creates family.** We are united not by flesh and blood but by the blood of Christ. We are adopted and brought into the family of God.
- **Consider how different the people were that Paul was working with:**
 - Onesimus was a slave
 - Luke was a doctor
 - Paul was Jewish Pharisee, doctor of Hebrew theology
 - Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus were Jewish converts
 - The rest of the people were probably Greek or some other race or ethnicity
 - Nympha was a woman who had a church in her house
 - All of these people are united by the blood of Christ
- Hey listen, Jews and Gentiles did not mix and would not choose to be friends with one another. Doctors and slaves would not be friends. Pharisees would not choose to be friends with Jewish people who were beneath them

on the social ladder. Men and women did not mix in social situations in first century culture. Women were beneath men.

But now we have this mix of people who are brought together by the gospel and everything changes. Slaves and free, doctors and slaves, professors and uneducated, women and men, Jews and Gentiles, all are united by the blood of Christ.

This is the way the gospel works. In life you might not choose to be friends with people that are different than you but because of the gospel that all changes because now you are family. God has chosen you and put you in His family. The call of the gospel creates family.

- **If you are here this morning and not a Christian then one of the beautiful blessings of being a follower of Christ is being adopted into the family of God.** You are not just adopted by flesh and blood parents, as special as that is, but by the One who created the universe, the King Himself adopts you. You are His because He redeems you in Christ. He made you and He bought you by the blood of Christ. This is what the call of the gospel does; it creates family and not just any family, the best family of all.

3) The call of the gospel creates gospel servants

- **Verse 7:** Tychius is a "*fellow servant in the Lord.*"
- **Verses 10-11:** Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus-Justus are "*fellow workers for the Kingdom of God.*"
- **Verses 12-13:** Epaphras is a "*servant of Christ.*"
- I need to be very careful here because it is easy to make people feel guilty and shame them into service with a text like this. Yet as a pastor I know where the holes are in our church. I know where we need deacons, leaders and workers. I never want to guilt or shame people into service because that is not gospel-change. My heart is that the gospel so works in your heart that it creates the heart of a servant.
- **I can shame you into serving for about three months but only the gospel can create a servant's heart in you.**
 - **You may ask to work and someone might say, "For you to work in this particular area you need to be a member."** This is not our attempt to exclude you but to disciple you by teaching you that part of being a servant is by covenanting with a local church. I guarantee you Paul knew his team well. He knew who he was responsible for and who he could depend on because they were part of his posse.
 - **Now if you are a college student and you are saying, "Well I won't be here very long so I am not sure about joining a church."** It does not matter if you are not going to be here very long. My daughter Alex just moved to Louisville to attend college at Boyce and finish up her bachelors. She won't be there very long. One of the last things I told her to help her prepare to move was as soon as you can find a gospel-preaching church and join it. Jump in and get connected. College is supposed to prepare you for real life right? You will not be around your peer group your whole life. You will always be around people older and younger than yourself. You will always be in positions where you follow and lead. At least let your church life prepare you for what real life is going to be like after college by joining a church and diving into that church's mission.

4) The call of the gospel creates gospel mission

- When you read **vv. 7-18** you find all kinds of gospel mission.
 - **Tychicus** was delivering supplies and letters to the churches.

- **Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus-Justus** were missionaries. Paul disciplined them and trained them and sent them out.
- **Epaphras** traveled with **Paul** and was a church planter.
- **Luke** traveled with **Paul** and was probably his personal physician who wrote for him and attended to his medical needs.
- Then there are the churches in **Colossae, Laodicea** and **Hierapolis** who were striving to spread the gospel in their areas.
- **As these people became followers of Christ they got on mission in a variety of ways.** Some answered the call to go the nations; some traveled back and forth supporting those on mission, some stayed where they were and spread the gospel there and all gave financially and prayed.
- **This is us.** This is what we do: some go, some visit, some stay and all of us give financially and pray.

5) **The call and cause of the gospel creates gospel community**

- **Here is what I mean by this. We all want gospel community.** The gospel calls us into a particular local church and we want community but sometimes it is hard to find. It is hard to find the friendships, the connectedness, the affection for one another and the fellowship of family connections.
- **Gospel cause creates gospel community.** If you want to build your connectedness to the local community then just dive into the mission of the church and you will build a sense of connectedness. You don't wait until you feel connected or have community to dive into the mission. Dive into the mission of the church and then connectedness and community will come.

The reasons we lead with our mission is because the result of diving into the mission builds the connectedness of community. One of the reasons some of you feel disconnected is because you have resisted getting on board with the mission and vision of GABC.

- **By the way, your connectedness will not be perfect.** You are connected to sinners who are rubbing shoulders with one another and you and I will struggle with each other's sin as we join the cause. So don't get this utopian idea that *well I am going to dive in and then everything will be perfect.* Nope! It won't. Part of our mission is to be gospel-centered and that means God will use the gospel of Jesus Christ to save others and to sanctify us as we IMPERFECTLY work together for the glory of God. The joy comes as we apply the gospel to our imperfect relationships. We learn to repent, to forgive, to encourage and this brings me to my sixth application.

6) **The centrality of the gospel creates gospel encouragement**

- How does gospel-centered family speak to one another? Listen to Paul's words throughout these verses:
 - **Beloved brother**
 - **Faithful minister**
 - *I have sent him . . . that he may **encourage your hearts***
 - **Fellow prisoner**
 - **Welcome Mark** (who had abandoned Paul earlier in his ministry)
 - *They have been a **comfort** to me*
 - *Epaphras is **always struggling for you** and working for your maturity*

- *Luke is beloved*
 - **Notice in this passage how Paul commended his posse for the way they encouraged him.** They blessed him.
 - **I want us to think for a minute how Paul's team encouraged him.** He commended the men under his care because they brought him joy as he lead and served with them.
 - **Illst:** In a 2013 issue of *ChurchLeaders.com*, Tim Peters identified 10 reasons pastors quit too soon. Let me give you the top three:
 - 1) **Discouragement.** 50% of pastors report feeling so discouraged they would leave the ministry if they could. What profession has that kind of discouragement? Tim Peters says, "*Complaints speak louder than compliments. You can receive 15 compliments and one complaint, and the complaint will stick. When you hear criticism and look out to see empty pews, it can be difficult to recognize the positive impact you're making.*"
 - 2) **Failure:** Peters reports that the statistics from *Pastoral Care Inc.* show that seventy percent of pastors say they have a lower self-image than when they started. This is most likely due to the barrage of constant criticism and critiques.
 - 3) **Loneliness:** Seventy percent of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend. Pastoral ministry often creates a sense of isolation because pastors cannot share their struggles with anyone and so instead of opening up their lives they instead internalize their struggles and isolate themselves.¹
 - **It is risky for me to speak on this topic like this because it can sound self-serving.** Yet you cannot read this text and not see the connection between Paul and his team and how their lives were a blessing to him.
 - I really do not mean this to sound self-serving but if you want to encourage your pastoral leadership just follow their leadership. **Hebrews 13:17**, "*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*" Practicing **Hebrews 13:17** will bless you and your leadership.
 - **Don't just encourage your pastors but encourage others as well.** Find ways to show kindness and build one another up. Practice this because you have been built up in Christ.
- 7) **The fellowship of the gospel is a fellowship of grace.**
- **Paul ends his letter the way he began the letter.** In **Colossians 1:2** he wrote, "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*" Now he closes the letter by saying, "*Grace be with you.*"
 - **Brothers and sisters the fellowship of the gospel is a fellowship of grace.** To be gospel-centered is to be filled with grace and overflowing with that grace onto others.
 - **Let me close the message and this series out with a quote from John Piper about Paul's blessing of grace at the end of this letter:**

*"Paul has in mind that the letter itself is a channel of God's grace . . . But as the end of the letter approaches, Paul realizes that the reading is almost finished and the question rises, 'What becomes of the grace that has been flowing to the readers through the reading of the inspired letter?' He answers with a blessing at the end of every letter: 'Grace [be] with you.' **With you** as you put the letter away and leave the church. **With you** as you go home to deal with a sick child and an unaffectionate spouse. **With you** as you go to work and face the temptations of anger and dishonesty*

¹ http://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/161343-tim_peters_10_common_reasons_pastors_quit_too_soon.html.

and lust. **With you** as you muster the courage to speak up for Christ over lunch . . . [Thus] we learn that grace is ready to flow to us every time we take up the inspired Scriptures to read them. And we learn that grace will abide with us when we lay the Bible down and go about our daily living.”²

Conclusion

- **The Lord’s Supper is a meal celebrating grace.** It is a means of grace. What do I mean by grace? I mean grace that shapes us more into the likeness of our Savior. As we take the Lord’s Supper this morning, we are reminded of the person and work of Christ on the cross. Jesus’ body was broken and His blood was spilled for us. Through this meal together the Father blesses believers with grace based on Christ’s work for us on the cross. This is the ground upon which the Spirit pours His grace out in our hearts. We are reminded and comforted that our salvation and our righteousness is based on the work of Another, Jesus Christ. He has secured our salvation because He chose us before the foundation of the world and will bless us with every spiritual blessing.
- Jesus took the Bread and said, “This is my body that was broken, do this in remembrance of Me.”
- In the same manner he took the cup and said, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*”
- **Doxology**
- **Blessing:** *Grace be with you!*

² John Piper, *Future Grace*, 66-67.