

**FRIENDS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL**

Colossians 4:7-18

**Intro:** The writings of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, give us a clear verbal picture of the kind of a man that he was. We can tell that he was a true Christian, a man deeply devoted to the true God, to Whom he referred many, many times, as his Father. But not only did he love God, but he loved in an equal way God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are indebted to the Apostle Paul also for much, perhaps most, of what we know about the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote frequently of his utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit for his own understanding of the truth of God, and for the Spirit's blessing upon himself in his ministry as an apostle.

But we also see in Paul's epistles that he was a man wholly dedicated to the spread of the Gospel to all people, both Jews and Gentiles. He preached tirelessly and boldly even though it meant much suffering, even imprisonment, and ultimately death. But he was a man greatly used by God throughout the Roman Empire in seeing people saved and then edified as he was instrumental in seeing churches established throughout the Empire. And foundational to his usefulness was the way in which he gave himself so faithfully to prayer that people might be saved, and the afterwards that they might grow in their knowledge of the Word, and in their conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was also looking for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. From his confinement in Rome he wrote to the church at Philippi telling them that he was in a dilemma, wanting to depart to be with the Lord, which he said was "far better," or to abide in the flesh that he might continue his ministry to the saints. Paul, in his life, and in his walk with the Lord and the way he served the Lord, was an example whom every child of God from that day to this, could well follow.

But I have said all of that, to say this: one of the outstanding features of Paul's life was *that he loved people*. This was apparent in his tireless efforts to reach people with the Gospel. It can be seen also in the way he prayed for people. I don't know if he had a prayer list written down on parchment, or if people were just written upon his heart, but he must have spent a great deal of time every day praying for people he knew by name and whom he continued to remember. Like the Lord Jesus, Paul had many enemies. The Jews pursued Paul like they did the Lord Jesus, and did all that they could to stop his ministry. But only when we get to

heaven, will we learn how many are in heaven because it was through the Apostle Paul that they first heard the Gospel of the grace of God.

As we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, we see that he mentioned many of his friends in Christ, and referred to many others whom he did not mention by name. These people were numbered among those who were the delight of Paul's life. Many of them had been a special blessing to Paul over a long period of time. All of them, with possibly one exception, you and I are going to meet some day when we get to heaven. What a blessing that will be! But for today we want to see what Paul had to say about them. There are nine of them.

Here are the names:

- 1) Tychicus (Col. 4:7-8).
- 2) Onesimus (4:9).
- 3) Aristarchus (4:10a).
- 4) Marcus (John Mark) (4:10b).  
(Barnabas)
- 5) Jesus, called Justus (4:11).
- 6) Epaphras (4:12-13).
- 7) Luke (4:14a).
- 8) Demas (4:14b).
- 9) Archippus (4:17).

## **I. TYCHICUS (Col. 4:7-8).**

Tychicus is mentioned four other times in the NT. We first meet him in Acts 20:4 where he was one of those who went with Paul from Macedonia to Troas which was across the Aegean Sea in the Roman province of Asia. In the Acts passage Tychicus and Trophimus are simply mentioned as "of Asia," but where in Asia we are not told. But we don't have to be concerned with that here. What is important is how the Apostle Paul spoke of him. He said that he was:

- 1) "A beloved brother, and
- 2) "A faithful minister and
- 3) "Fellowservant in the Lord."

He was quite evidently a Gentile, and Paul called him "a beloved brother." Do you suppose that Paul had any Gentile friends before he was saved? I doubt it very much, certainly none whom he would have called "a beloved brother." What made the difference? Well, the fact that he

could call him a “brother” meant that he and Tychicus were brothers in the family of God! There all racial barriers are broken down. By the word “beloved” Paul meant that Tychicus was very dear to him. We can be sure that Tychicus felt the same way about Paul that Paul felt about him, but here we see how Paul felt. That is what is significant.

Second, Paul called Tychicus “a faithful minister.” The word translated “minister” is the Greek word from which we get our English word *deacon*. But Paul was not speaking of Tychicus as a deacon, but as the Lord’s servant who was quick to do whatever task he was to do. “Faithful” means that he could be trusted to do what he was asked to do. So Paul was declaring that he trusted Tychicus, and that Tychicus would do what Paul was sending him to do. Furthermore he was indicating that Tychicus would move Paul’s request ahead of anything else he had planned to do until his mission was fulfilled.

The word “faithful” probably goes with the third term that Paul used with reference to Tychicus. He was a faithful “fellow servant.” Paul did not place himself in a position where he was Tychicus’ master, but on the same plane with Tychicus. He and Tychicus made not have had the same place of ministry (Paul being an apostle), but Paul was indicating here that in their mutual reference to Christ, they stood on the same ground. With such an attitude, it is no wonder that Paul attracted faithful men to serve the Lord by his side.

Tychicus was charged with the responsibility of taking this epistle to the church at Colosse, and, as we learn from Eph. 6:21-22, to take the Ephesian epistle to Ephesus, as well as to see that the epistle to Philemon was given to him in Colosse. What a responsibility Tychicus had! This was a mission that must not fail because the a major part of the inspired Word was involved. In the other two references to Tychicus in the NT, 2 Tim. 4:12 and Titus 3:12, Tychicus is spoken of as being sent by Paul on missions.

The reading about one added detail about Tychicus’ mission to Colosse probably ought to read like his mission to Ephesus is described in Eph. 6:22, not that “he might know your estate,” but that they might know how it was with Paul. That was what would comfort their hearts.

When we write letters to those we love, we ought always tell them honestly how we are because that is what they are most concerned about. And

when the report is good, as it was with Paul, that would bring comfort, bring encouragement to their hearts. The church has never had too many men who could bear the name Tychicus.

## **II. ONESIMUS (Col. 4:9).**

The story of Onesimus is one of the most wonderful stories of God's grace to be found anywhere in the Bible. Paul's epistle to Philemon will give it to you.

Onesimus was an unprofitable servant who belonged to Philemon. He had run away from Philemon and had made his way to Rome. In Rome, somehow, he had come into contact with the Apostle Paul, through Paul Onesimus had been saved, and Paul was sending him back to Philemon, accompanied by Tychicus for Onesimus' encouragement. But Onesimus was not going back the same unprofitable servant. He was going back a man who had been transformed by the Gospel of Christ.

How does Paul describe Onesimus? As "a faithful and beloved brother." Before he had not been trustworthy. He probably had been most unfaithful. But Paul had seen enough evidence of salvation in Onesimus that he was thoroughly convinced that Onesimus had been saved. He was sending Onesimus back to Philemon a changed man whom Paul loved as he loved Tychicus. This was one of many things that Tychicus and Onesimus had in common. They were both dearly loved by Paul. How honored they must have felt, and grateful to God.

## **III. ARISTARCHUS (Col. 4:10a).**

Both Acts 20:4 and 27:2 tell us that Aristarchus was from Thessalonica. Evidently both Aristarchus and Epaphras were prisoners of Rome along with the Apostle Paul. Aristarchus had probably been one of Paul's companions who had been with him the longest. He sent his greetings to them along with Paul's. Obviously he was one who would go to prison rather than deny his Lord or abandon his testimony of the Gospel of the grace of God.

## **IV. MARCUS (Col. 4:10b).**

There is a story behind this name, too. There seems to be little doubt but that this was John Mark who accompanied Paul and Barnabas, his uncle,

on their first missionary journey. However, at Pamphylia John Mark left them, and returned to Jerusalem. See Acts 13:13. Why he left, we do not know. But when Paul and Barnabas prepared to make a second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again. But Paul refused. See Acts 15:36-41. This was one of the sad times in Paul's ministry.

However, things had changed. Paul and John Mark had been reconciled, and at the time when Paul wrote the Colossian letter John Mark was with him in Rome. And he encouraged that church at Colosse to receive him if he came to them. In a moment we will see another sad situation which was yet to develop, but here at least we see a sad situation which had become blessed by the Lord. When Paul wrote his last epistle to be included in Scripture, 2 Timothy, we read that the Apostle Paul said this to Timothy about John Mark during his second and final imprisonment in Rome: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

(**Barnabas** is mentioned in connection with John Mark, but he was not involved with the Apostle Paul at this particular time. Whether he was still alive at this time, we do not know. But it seems that we are safe in assuming that the trouble between Paul and Barnabas had been resolved.)

## **V. JESUS, WHICH IS CALLED JUSTUS (Col. 4:11a).**

We don't know anything about this man except what is written here. He was a Jew, like Aristarchus and Marcus. We know that he was a believer because he is called here, "the Just," meaning *righteous*. From the latter part of this verse we see that Paul called him a "fellowworker," and that he had been "a comfort" to Paul. He had been Paul's encourager. In what way, we do not know. But the Spirit of God has given him a place of special honor by having the Apostle Paul. There are many of the people of God who have had a ministry to men like the Apostle Paul, whose names are recorded in heaven, and whose work will be on display when we are all in glory.

## **VI. EPAPHRAS (Col. 4:12-13).**

He is only mentioned in Colossians and Philemon. Cf. Col. 1:7; 4:12-13; Ph. 23. In this latter verse we learn that Epaphras, along with Paul and Aristarchus, was a prisoner of Rome.

He was a Colossian. It is thought by many that he had been saved under Paul's ministry, possibly in Ephesus, that he had take the Gospel to Colosse, and that it was through him that the church was established there. He, like Tychicus, was much loved by the Apostle Paul, and also was "a faithful minister of Christ" (Col. 1:7). But what seems to have been the strong point in Epaphras' life was his praying. In his praying he was like a combatant dealing with an antagonist in the games. This idea is in the words, "laboring fervently for you in prayers." And it is significant that Paul did not say "occasionally" or "from time to time," which would have meant the same thing. But he said "always laboring fervently for you in prayers." Only he was not in the games, but he was engaged in spiritual warfare in which there was no letup.

And what was his burden? "That ye (plural, including all of them) might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." This ought to remind us of Paul's words in Ephesians:

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10-11).

And in the same passage he followed with these words:

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth ..." (Eph. 6:13-14)

In those days a soldier who fell was doomed to defeat. So it was the only way of victory for you to stand and for your enemy to fall. Epaphras prayed "always" and "fervently" that the people would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." That is why Paul prayed as he did for the believers in Colosse according to what he said in Col. 1:9. And this is the way we need to pray for each other. These men were not thinking about those times of special need when we are seeking to know the will of God, but they were praying that the will of God which is revealed in His Word would be the directing and controlling force in all of their lives.

May the Lord give us more Epaphrases, and may each one of us be an Epaphras! Note that Epaphras prayed the same way for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

## VII. LUKE (Col. 4:14a).

He was Paul's personal physician and fellow missionary. And he was the writer of the Gospel which bears his name. What a legacy he has left for believers everywhere! He was probably a Gentile, although there are some who think he was a Jew. Whatever the truth is, Paul loved him deeply. Luke had ministered to Paul not only in a physical way, but also spiritually.

### **VIII. DEMAS (Col. 4:14b).**

All that Paul said about Demas was just "Demas." He made no comment about him except that he wanted to send his greetings to the church at Colosse. Perhaps Paul had already become suspicious that things were not right with Demas. Obviously Demas was with Paul in Rome, but Paul did not say that he was a faithful servant, or a fellowworker, or beloved. He is the only one of the nine mentioned here in the closing verses of this epistle about whom Paul did not have something good to say.

Probably about three years later Paul was writing his second letter to Timothy, and he was urging Timothy to come as soon as he could. And then he immediately followed his appeal to Timothy with these sad and tragic words found in 2 Tim. 4:10a:

10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica ...

Paul had his great joys in his ministry, but he also had his great sorrows. This must have been one of the greatest. We don't know if Demas ever came back, but it is probably the case that he did not. It reminds me of what John wrote about those disciples in John 6 who apparently were unhappy about what the Lord had been teaching. And so he wrote:

From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him (John 6:66).

And many of you will remember the words of the Apostle John which are recorded for us in 1 John 2:19:

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Oh, how important it is that we make our calling and election sure.

Before we come to the ninth and last name, Paul sent special greetings from himself and those who were with him to the church of Laodicea and

to Nymphas in whose home the church met (which is all we know about Nymphas). Paul wanted them to read the letter he had just written to the church at Colosse, and he wanted them to hear the letter that had been written to the church at Laodicea, probably the epistle to the Ephesians which seems to have been a circular letter written to several churches.

### **IX. ARCHIPPUS (Col. 4:17).**

From the first two verses of Paul's letter to Philemon it is thought that Archippus was the son of Philemon and his wife, Apphia, a family with which Paul was well acquainted. The reference here in Col. 4:17 would indicate that Archippus, Philemon's son, was the present pastor of the church at Colosse. Paul was encouraging him to be faithful in fulfilling the ministry that the Lord had given him there. It was a ministry that Archippus has received from the Lord, not a ministry that Archippus was to lay out for himself. How important it is that everyone who is called to minister to the people of God, acquaint himself with the Scriptures, and primarily the ministry of the Apostle Paul, to learn what the ministry is. It does not vary from generation to generation, or the Bible would constantly have to be updated. But it stands as it was written, and so does the ministry of the church.

**Concl:** Paul did not write his own epistles, evidently due to poor eyesight. But he always signed them as proof that the message of the epistles was truly from him. His "bonds," or chains, would be a reminder to the church of the need that the Apostle had for their faithful support in prayers. And, as usual, Paul concluded with his constant prayer for the Lord's people everywhere in his day, and in our day too: "Grace be with you. Amen." So may God's grace be with us today and every day.