

## Colossians 4.7-18

4 sections:

- I. Paul commends the two bearers of the letter (vv. 7-9)
- II. Greetings from the six colleagues with him (vv.10-14)
- III. Greetings to Christians in the Colossae area (vv.15-17)
- IV. Personal signing off (v.18)

I. Bearers of the letter:

Tychicus: (Tikicus)

- Beloved brother = fellow Christian (from Asia [Acts 20.4]) who had accompanied Paul on his journey back to Jerusalem at end of 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. Paul later sent him to Ephesus (2 Tim 4.12), and Crete (Titus 3.12).
- Faithful minister (=worker, reliable and trustworthy). He has borne Paul's letters before – see Eph 6.21f., commended with almost exactly the same words.
- Fellow servant/slave (i.e. belongs not to himself but to the Lord)

Onesimus: (Onesimus)

- The faithful and beloved brother – a true Christian, who may need Tychicus' support, given his story (see Philemon). NB. Paul could have referred to him as "that runaway slave"! He is presumably returning to Philemon.
- Who is one of you, i.e. a Colossian

Their purpose (= Eph 6.21f.):

- That Tychicus may tell the Colossians "all the news about me". A reminder that Paul wrote little about himself. Rather, he addressed pressing issues in the receiving church – esp. faith and conduct threatening the church. A letter/written message on its own can easily be misunderstood. By sending it via trusted companions Paul ensures best chance of no misunderstandings. Cf. Acts 15. The role of messengers in explaining message was an important one in ANE.
- So that you may know how we are – surely so that they will pray!

- That he (Tychicus) may encourage your hearts => mutuality: they pray for Paul (as in v.3), but are encouraged by his suffering, work, witness and "struggle"/prayer for them (see 1.24-2.2)

## II. Greetings from the colleagues with him (vv.10-14)

### Aristarchus

- "my fellow prisoner". Only one described as such. From Thessalonica, and had been with Paul in Ephesus and sailed with him to Rome (Acts 20.4; 27.2). A good man to have. Was there when the people rioted in the temple of Diana and got captured by the mob (Acts 19.29), and there when Paul set sail from Rome (Acts 27.2)

### Mark

- The cousin of Barnabas. A member of Jerusalem church and related to some of its important leaders (see (Acts 12.12, Peter goes to Mark's mother's house). He was with Barnabas and Saul when they returned to Jerusalem at the end of their year-long mission at Antioch (Acts 12.25).
- Concerning whom you have received instructions – re his being reconciled to Paul after the earlier rift between them?
- "If he comes to you, welcome him". Mark's early career = chequered. Having been recruited as assistant (Acts 13.5), he abandoned Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13.13) so that Paul refused to take him on the second (Acts 15.37ff.). Clearly reconciliation between Paul and Mark by now (confirmed by 2 Tim 4.11; Phil 24). Peter speaks of him as "My son" (1 Peter 5.13). But Paul must commend to them a man who he had once dismissed as useless for the service of Christ (Acts 15.38).

### Jesus, who is called Justus

#### They:

- The only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God. Possibly a reference to them having once belonged to the 'circumcision party' (see Acts 10.45; 11.2; Gal 2.12), or simply that they are Jews.
- Have been a comfort to me

## Epaphras

- One of you. A Colossian, founder of the Colossae church (1.7-8)
- A servant of Christ Jesus. Philemon 23, he's also in prison.
- Always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf
- He has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. i.e he has a vision for the whole Lycus valley and is working hard to advance it.

SECOND STRONG COMMENDATION (with 1.7f.)

## Luke

- The beloved physician. If the ref in v. 11 is to Jews rather than the circumcision party, then Luke is a Gentile. He will be the last person with Paul at 2 Tim 4.11.

## Demas

Will later desert Paul, having fallen "in love with this present world" (2 Tim 4.10).

### III. Greetings to Christians in the Colossae area (vv.15-17)

The brothers and sisters in Laodicea

Nympha and the church in her house (or some mms. Nymphas)

Exchange letters with the church in Laodicea. Paul clearly understands and intends them as authoritative. Tychicus would almost certainly have gone through Laodicea if travelling from Ephesus to Colossae.

Say to Archippus. "See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord." Archippus is described in Philemon 2 as Paul's "fellow-soldier", and seems to be a member of Philemon's household, or at least his house church.

### IV. Personal signing off (v.18)

Greeting "with my own hand" – authenticates letter and demonstrates his affection

"Remember my chains" – "remember" conveys idea of 'recognise' or 'acknowledge' => not an appeal for sympathy, but a testament to his authority (Martin)

Grace be with you. Grace = the subject of the whole letter (God's grace in sending his Son to die for us); as well as the object (Paul writes in order to be a means of grace). Only by God's grace will the community stand and grow to maturity.

1. **Reminder not a theological treatise but a real letter to real people.** Paul is a great theologian; but he is a great pastor too.

NT Wright:

The question is, can we in our day hold together the thinking and writing of great thoughts and the challenge of pastoral care, prayer and concern? If not, perhaps there is something wrong with our great thoughts.

Paul places great importance on the bonds created by prayer and letter writing.

NB. the two letters that have the most extensive personal greetings/commendations are the two to places/people Paul hadn't ever visited – Romans and Colossians.

Without frequent news no relationship can flourish.

V. imp for mission partnerships.

- Not a bad word to say, only commendation
- Mutuality – While Paul prays for, and exercises authority over his readers, he also relies on their prayers, and acknowledges his need of/dependence upon his supporters – esp. the 3 Jews “who have been a comfort to me” (11)

Paul's love and care for individuals is apparent.

NB. he treats them all equally,

- the runaway slave Onesimus too is “the faithful and beloved brother”
- he is one of you”, i.e not a lesser being as a slave.

Testimony to restored relationships – esp. with Mark

2. **Affirms priority of prayer in Paul's ministry.**

What does Paul pray? Clues in his commendation of Epaphras' prayer (v. 12)

- So that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. This = the goal: maturity (cf. 1.28). This = what should be praying for, rather than what to 'do'.

Elsewhere in letter see this

- 1.3-8 joyful thanksgiving for
  - their faith in CJ,
  - their love for one another,

- their hope in the Gospel)
- vv. 9-12 “that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding... to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord... pleasing to him... bearing fruit... increasing in the knowledge of God... strengthened...”)
- 2.1-3 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ

Though they have never met, prayer binds them together – as it does for us when we pray for brothers and sisters elsewhere whom we haven’t met (esp. when know their needs). Meet in heaven

### 3. **A pastor and theologian, but also Apostle and leader.**

Paul’s authority, in spite of his absence/imprisonment, is implicit in these closing words (cf. parables of talents etc. where master is absent):

- Sends Tychicus and Onesimus on their mission
- Reinforces instructions about Mark
- Requires that his letters be circulated to other churches
- Sends an urgent and public message to Archippus

4. **Paul is generous in sharing his ministry**, partnering with others, trusting them. He backs them publicly and strongly, commending them, in spite of past doubts (Mark). He trusts them to fill out his letter, giving it context, adding to it to give the full picture and message (v.9), and clarifying Paul’s meaning and intention.

BUT

He **places a high premium on faithfulness – loyalty** – to Christ (see 2.6-7) and himself.

### 5. **Finishing the race = so important.**

All are to grow to maturity, into the image of Christ, so graphically described in ch.1

Contrast Mark and Demas.

Note charge to Archippus

Note Paul’s own chains: he is suffering, like Christ (see 1.24)

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. How has your life, and your relationships, been affected by letter-writing? Have you received any significant letters – letters which have had a significant impact or influence upon you? Some might like to share about such an experience.
2. What might Paul's employment of letter-writing teach us about how we can build and maintain relationships with other churches within CCAANZ, and with our overseas mission partners? You might think beyond letters to emails, phone calls, messages of other kinds...
3. Why do you think Paul goes to such lengths to commend the likes of Tychicus, Onesimus, Mark and Epaphras? How important are commendations of Christian ministers/workers these days? How much store should we put by them?
4. Consider carefully the prayers of Paul in 1.3-12 and 2.1-3, and of Epaphras in 4.12. What are their priorities? What are the priorities of our own prayers?
5. Paul charges Archippus to "fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." What ministry have you received, and how are you fulfilling it? If anyone does not think they have received a ministry, perhaps they might consider being prayed for to know what the Lord is calling them to.