

## Section 12: Living it Out: Maintaining Fellowship with those at the sharp end.

### Colossians 4:7 - 18

*4:7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.*

*9: He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.*

*10: My fellow-prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)*

*11: Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.*

*12: Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.*

*14: Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.*

*15: Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.*

*16: After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.*

*17: Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."*

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

Although Paul is conscious of his role and responsibility toward the Colossian Christians, his obligation to them and, especially, his commissioning by God, he maintains a healthy - and genuine - regard for other believers. He maintains fellowship with all those at the sharp end.

In this final section that is seen in the areas of:

1. Information:
2. Intimacy, and
3. Involvement

There is a very real need for the church to recapture a vision of what it is here for, of what it is really about, what its purpose is, and what it should be engaged in.

With that in mind, the whole area of mission and evangelism is very much to the fore. This passage before us could be seen as an address for a missionary conference, for those who are far from home and the work that they carry out in the name of the church - and the contact and support network that there needs to be.

Yet it is specifically about the work of the church and applies very much in our day and to our generation.

Let's look first at the area of disseminating

1. Information -

Providing and sharing information leads to encouragement. People need to know what is happening and to respond and acknowledge that. In missionary circles, every effort is made to keep people informed as to what is going on in the mission field. In the same way we need to share what is happening in the different spheres of our mission and outworking of God's purpose.

Several people are mentioned here. They provide good examples.

**Tychicus** is commended as a '*beloved brother, faithful servant and a fellow bond servant in the Lord*.' His mission is to tell people about Paul's situation so that people might know what is going on, and that they might understand the circumstances of the work of the gospel.

He is also said to encourage the hearts of believers. They should be encouraged because the work i.e. the proclamation of the gospel, is being done, that people are coming to faith in Jesus.

**Onesimus** is commended as '*our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number*'. His mission is to '*tell you everything that is happening here*' so that they can support the believers, feel an essential part of the exercise.

That "belonging" highlights the value of

## 2. Intimacy

This refers to partnership in the gospel and the sense of belonging to each other.

There were three Jewish converts amongst the company - fellow workers for the Kingdom. They were Aristarchus - known as '*my fellow prisoner*'. Another was Mark - the cousin of Barnabas (about whom there had been special instructions given) who was to be welcomed when he came. And, there was Jesus - '*who is called Justus*'. All three had proved a comfort and an encouragement to Paul. They were close partners.

Others mentioned here include Epaphras - who is commended as '*one who is of your number, a bond slave of Jesus Christ*.' His mission was a prayer ministry and that for a particular purpose, '*that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured*'. Three characteristics of that prayer are highlighted. They are: to stand firm, to be mature and to have that assurance of being in the centre of God's will.

Then there was Luke - '*the beloved physician*', who was obviously '*greatly loved*'. In contrast, there was Demas. Later Paul would lament

that Demas would forsake him having '*loved the world too much*' (2 Timothy 4:10). Yet, he was included in the circle.

This intimacy and sense of belonging, being part of what is going on, is an important feature of living in fellowship. The church is defined as one body, with each part not only belonging but valued and recognised. Does that not have implications for us to be part of the central activity of what the church is about?

That leads to:

### 3. Involvement - Sharing of the news.

Paul's instruction was that they should '*pass along the greetings*' - If we are in the church then we are in this together. It is a communal activity that should be of interest and importance to all the members of the church family. It highlights the oddity of people who think that they can be part of the church and never be there and never be involved in what is going on. That is not "church."

The Christians in Colossae were to have fellowship with neighbouring believers. They were to exchange letters with the church at Laodicea. There is always something that we can be learning - and sharing. It is said that 'every day is a school day'; and this is also the case in the Christian faith. God can be teaching us new things all the time; so we need to be receptive to all that He is saying and to all that is happening. Part of that is to recognise and greet other believers.

Then, finally, there is Archippus, Paul's 'last shot' (but a very essential one) in this letter. He is told to "*do what you are supposed to be doing.*"

What an important - and obvious - lesson! There are so many who see what needs doing, sometimes feel called of God to 'do' things or 'be' something, to be involved in some form of active service; and yet they don't complete the work they are given to do! Involvement is doing the obvious and necessary, diligently, faithfully in complementary partnership with other members of the body and co-ordinated by God as a testimony to Himself.

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And so, Colossians finishes on this practical note, having highlighted the fact that it is all Christ.

Christ is the expression of God. He is the message. It is He whom we receive when we become Christians.

There are riches in Him. *Christ in you, the hope of glory.* His word can dwell in us richly. He is all we need.

It is His life that is to be worked out in practice: in family and work, in mission and evangelism, in fellowship, in belonging, and in service.

Let us be equally challenged that we get our priorities right and actively, deliberately - and consistently - *seek those things which are above.*

We have abundant resources in Christ.

We also have the responsibility.

That is being "church" in our day and age, and particularly in this centenary year.