

COLOSSIANS
Paul's Final Thoughts
Colossians 4:12-18

INTRODUCTION

Someone said, "God evidently does not intend for most of us to be rich, or powerful or great but He does intend for all of us to be friends and have friends." The Apostle Paul had many enemies and a few really good Christian friends who he loved and who loved him. People either loved Paul or hated him. He produced no neutral friends. Paul was able, by God's grace, to put around him men who loved Christ and men who loved Paul and the ministry God laid on his heart.

At the time of writing the Letter to the Colossians, Paul was in a Roman jail, under house arrest with a Roman soldier chained to him at the wrist. Most of the Christian leaders in Rome wanted nothing to do with Paul and looked upon him as a bad influence for the Christian movement. Someone has defined a friend this way: "A friend - the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out." When the Roman government was against Paul, when the Roman populace was against Paul and when the vast majority of Christian leaders in Rome wanted nothing to do with Paul, there were still a few true friends who stuck by Paul. Paul learned the hard way the truth: "If you really want to know who your friends are, just make a mistake."

We have in Colossians 4:7-18, the closing thoughts of Paul to the Colossian Christians and the Christians at Laodicea.

GREETINGS FROM PAUL'S COMPANIONS IN RCME 4:10-14

Epaphras - A Pastor's Heart (12,13): ***Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings.*** - This is the second time Epaphras is mentioned in Colossians. In 1:7,8 it says, ***"You learned it (the truth of the gospel of grace) from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit."*** We learn this about Epaphras from these verses: 1) He preached the gospel of free grace for salvation apart from any works; 2) He was a fellow bondsman of Christ and dear to Paul because he was loyal to Christ and loyal to Paul's ministry; 3) He was a faithful minister in that he did his ministry for Christ and not for men and he declared the gospel without compromise; and 4) He was undoubtedly the Senior Pastor of the Church at Colosse. He probably founded the church. He was so burdened about the spiritual condition of his church, he went to Rome to seek Paul's advice about this Gnostic heresy which was invading the churches of Colosse, Hieropolis and Laodicea. Epaphras was a humble pastor and realized he didn't know everything and there were times when he needed to seek help from older, wiser men of God.

A Man Of Prayer: ***He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*** -- Epaphras had a pastor's heart and he wrestled in prayer for the Colossian Christians. He continually prayed. He persevered in prayer. He was at it as much as possible. The word "wrestle" actually should be translated "agonize." On his knees, he agonized in prayer for his flock. There may have been times of prayer when he got up off his knees totally spent, completely exhausted. This man had mastered the art of prayer. Epaphras was in Rome praying for the Colossians who were hundreds of miles away. He understood that prayer reaches across the barrier of time, the barrier of distance and the barrier of obstacles. This fellow Epaphras was convinced prayer truly worked and gave himself wholeheartedly to this spiritual exercise.

"Many of the honest but not so eminent Christians I know have felt (at least once) that prayer was more of a stumbling block than a hearthstone of their spiritual lives. In 1968 Newsweek ran a feature entitled "Can Modern Man Pray?" It concluded that most could not. More recent surveys show that although an astoundingly large number of Americans claim to have religion, the clergy report that prayer and prayer groups are "especially successful" in only one percent of their churches." (W. Bingham Hunter, God Who Hears, IV Press, p.9).

Prayer To Stand Firm: ***That you may stand firm in all the will of God,*** -- Epaphras prayed that his flock would stand firm in the truth of Christ and do the will of God, not going after the false teaching of the Gnostics who said Christ was less than God, a mere angel, and that salvation was attained by doing certain kinds of works. They were to know the truth and the truth would liberate them from all bondage. ***"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'"*** (Jn. 8:31,32).

Prayer To Mature: ***Mature,*** -- Paul prayed the Colossian Christians would mature; that is, grow up in their knowledge of Christ and their experiencing of Christ, so they would not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine. ***"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*** (II Pet. 3:18).

Prayer Of Assurance: ***And fully assured.*** -- Most of these Colossian Christians were young in their faith. They were impressionable and ran after every new fad. They, consequently, could not get assurance of their salvation. Epaphras prayed that his people would be fully assured of salvation, and thus serve Christ out of love and not fear.

Notice that Epaphras' prayers were not for success, numbers, money, programs, buildings or whatever but for the spiritual growth of the people. The ministry is not things but people. What was Epaphras' main ministry? The invaluable ministry of intercession.

A Man Of Hard Work: *I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hieropolis.* -- Undoubtedly Epaphras told Paul all about his labor and toil among the churches in the Lycos Valley. Paul was satisfied that Epaphras was no loafer in the ministry. He worked hard at it. It was not a job or a profession but a ministry to which he had been called by God.

There are many pastors who rarely pray for their flock, who spend a few hours a week in sermon preparation, rarely read a book, visit at a minimum and more or less drift doing as little as possible in the church. Not so with Epaphras. He was a zealous, devoted and caring pastor, and so should every man who claims to be a minister of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke - A Medical Missionary (14a): Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, -- Luke, the beloved physician and writer of the Third Gospel and Acts was also with Paul in Rome. It appears that Luke and Paul first met at Troas on the Second Missionary Journey. Apparently Paul had contracted an oriental eye disease called ophthalmia which produces almost total blindness and which causes a repulsive appearance. He probably contracted the disease on his First Missionary Journey as he was going through the lowlands of Pamphylia where the disease was prevalent. *“As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.”* (Gal. 4:13). *“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”* (Gal. 6:11). Paul asked God three times to heal him of this dreaded disease and God said “no”. *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* (II Cor. 12:7-10). Paul probably went to Dr. Luke for medical treatment and while being treated Paul led Luke to Christ. Paul could relate to Luke because Paul was an educated and cultured man as was Luke. Luke then became Paul’s personal physician. Luke gave up a very lucrative career in order to tend to Paul’s disease and to preach the gospel of Christ. Luke and Paul were not always together but we find them crossing paths during the Second and Third Missionary Journeys so Luke could keep an eye on Paul’s deteriorating disease. Luke became a great follower of Christ and a believer and supporter of Paul’s ministry. Three years later, in Paul’s final imprisonment, we find that only Luke was with Paul right to the bitter end. *“Only Luke is with me.”* (II Tim. 4:11). Luke was a faithful and trusted friend and doctor to Paul.

A fact we should note is that Dr. Luke could not heal Paul and God would not heal him. God chose not to heal Paul because He had a higher purpose for Paul’s life. We cannot say God could not heal Paul or that Paul did not have enough faith to be healed. God is sovereign and He alone knows what is best for His servants.

It should be noted that Mark, Luke and Paul were all in Rome who combined wrote about 60% of the New Testament. This partially explains the great unity of the 260 chapters of the New Testament; for approximately 155 were written by these three men. You can be sure they were checking notes.

Demas - A Lover Of The World (14b): *And Denes send greetings.* -- Demas, as far as Paul knew, at the writing of this letter, was a fellow worker in Christ. (Phil. 24). But Paul could not read the human heart, for he would later desert the Apostle Paul in his final imprisonment in Rome. It may be that Paul already had some hints of his unfaithfulness because nothing in this context is said about Demas at all. Perhaps Paul already saw the signs of apostasy creeping into the life of Demas.

We do know that three years later in Paul's final imprisonment, he said of Demas: *"For Denes, because he loved this world (age) has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica"* (II Time. 4:10). It is clear that Demas deserted Paul, left him in the lurch, abandoned him when Paul most needed him. Some commentators think Demas deserted Paul because he felt that to stay with him would mean his own death. The word "world" should be translated "age." Demas, they say, loved this age more than the future age and so was afraid to die. However, other commentators, and I agree with them, think more is implied in this verse. Demas deserted Paul because he loved this present age. Demas loved this present age more than the future age to come - heaven. When he left Paul outwardly, he left Jesus Christ inwardly. Demas made a conscious, deliberate decision that the present age had more to offer than Christianity and its beliefs in the future age of glory. Christianity with its hardships, dangers and difficulties was not worth enduring when he could live it up in the here and now. Demas wanted the success and glamour of the world. He wanted sensual excitement, attractive women, immediate success. He wanted material things. He wanted to be seen with the right people in the right places. He wanted to live in the nicest home in the right neighborhood. He wanted to wear the best and most stylish togas, have the nicest sword and drive the fastest chariots. He wanted the things of this world he could see now and not wait for the things of the future world which are the inheritance of Christians by faith.

Now I do not want to imply that it is wrong to have a nice home, wear stylish clothes or drive fancy cars. It was that Demas loved these things more than Christ, so much so that he was willing to sell his soul to the devil to get them. It is not money which is evil, but the love of money which is evil. *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."* (I Tim. 6:10).

Was Demas saved and then lost? We don't know what motivated Demas to be involved with the ministry. Maybe he had a heart for humanity and wanted to help people; maybe he was a political activist and saw Christianity as a way to overthrow the yoke of Rome; maybe he had a yearning for excitement but when he got into Christianity he found it wasn't the kind of excitement he wanted. Demas was a mere professor but not a possessor of Christ because one cannot love the world and love the Father too. *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (I Jn. 2:15). Demas represents

the seed which fell among thorns in the Parable of the Sower which says, ***“And the seed sown among the thorns represents the people who heard the message and go on their way, and with the worries and riches and pleasures of living, the life is choked out of them, and in the end they produce nothing.”*** (Luke 8:14). “Wait”, you say, “didn’t Demas believe once and serve faithfully?” Yes, it appeared so outwardly but God alone knows the human heart and it is those who are truly motivated to do God’s will who are genuinely saved no matter how many claims they make to Christianity or spectacular things they do. ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.’”*** (Matt. 7:21-23). And with this tragic final statement about Demas - “He loved this world” - he disappears from sacred history as do all apostates.

“Hold it,” you say, “didn’t Mark desert Paul when he was a young man and Mark was saved?” Yes he did but Mark repented. Mark rebounded. Mark came back but there is no evidence that Demas ever repented. His heart had always been hardened to Christ but he must have really liked Paul. Demas like so many so-called Christians, learned to put up a good front.

You say, “Why would Paul pick a man like Demas to be a fellow worker?” Paul could not read a heart. Furthermore, Paul couldn’t always be right in his choice of friends. Even Christ who chose the Twelve had Judas Iscariot who was an unbeliever and apostate. Apostates are everywhere inside the church and they will sooner or later declare themselves.

GREETINGS TO PAUL’S FRIENDS IN LAODICEA 5:15

Brothers At Laodicea (15a): ***Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea,*** -- Laodicea was only a few miles from Colosse and Paul sends brief greetings to them because he was sure this letter would be read to the Laodiceans. The “brothers of Laodicea” probably refers to a special men’s group for service in the Church of Laodicea.

Nympha (15b): ***And to Nympha*** -- Nympha was a Christian woman who opened her home for a house church in Laodicea. She undoubtedly had the gift of hospitality.

The early church met in homes (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:9). In the New Testament, the church (called out ones) always refers to an assembly of believers and never a building or a place where Christians meet. For the first 300 years of the church, the church never met in official buildings but only in homes. Can you imagine fancy pageantry, massive choirs, ornate decorations, elaborate liturgy, an impressive processional, strict formality or whatever occurring in someone’s front room?

Church (15c): ***And the church in her house.*** -- The “church” is believers in Christ, not buildings, not programs, not denominations. The church is the “called out ones” by God’s grace. The church meets in buildings but the church is not a physical building, or physical tabernacle or physical temple. A failure to see that the church is people, a spiritual building and not a physical building has brought many wrong practices to the Christian church.

GIVING OF FINAL INSTRUCTION 4:16,17

The Letter to the Colossians (16a): ***After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans*** -- This was a cyclical letter to be passed around among the churches in the Lycos Valley. The Colossians would probably make a copy and send the original on to the Laodiceans and other churches.

The Letter to the Laodiceans (16b): ***And that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.*** -- Apparently Paul also wrote a letter to the Church of Laodicea but it was never intended to be a part of inspired scripture so it was lost.

Many have tried to forge this letter and there is a pseudo letter to the Laodiceans but it does not meet the criteria to be canon and has been rejected by the church from the beginning.

The Charge To Archippus (17): ***Tell Archippus: See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord,*** -- Some see this as an encouragement to Archippus like, “God has called you to His work, get in there and complete it!” But it most likely is a subtle rebuke. Archippus may have been Philemon’s son and was probably the interim pastor at the Church at Colosse in the absence of Epaphras. Paul told the church to give Archippus an admonition to complete the work God gave him to do. What was that work? We can’t be dogmatic but it was probably related to pastoring the flock at Colosse. Perhaps he was not studying, praying and preaching as he should. Perhaps he was compromising the truth because he didn’t want to lose members or have people dislike him. Perhaps he was soft on the Gnostics who were disrupting the church. It may be he was interested in keeping numbers of people at the expense of doctrinal purity. Archippus had to learn what all pastors must learn if they are going to be worth their salt - God’s man must do God’s ministry to please God and not men, and he must complete the work for the glory of God and not for the praise of men.

GRANTING A BENEDICTION 4:18

Paul’s Signature (18a): ***I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand*** -- All of the Letter to the Colossians was dictated by Paul to a secretary but now Paul signs the letter to give it his stamp of Apostolic authority.

Paul's Chains (18b): ***Remember my chains.*** -- Paul wants no pity, no sentimental plea for sympathy. As his wrist clanged as he began to write, he remembered he was in chains for the cause of Christ. The chains are Paul's chains of authority, guaranteeing him the right to speak. It is though he said, "This is no letter from a rookie Christian, but one who has suffered and sacrificed for Christ.

Paul's Concern For Grace (18c): ***Grace be with you.*** -- Paul closes this letter as he closed most of his letters - on the note of God's pure, free, undeserved grace for salvation and Christian living. Grace liberates the Christian from all legalistic bondage of any kind. Grace motivates the Christian to serve Christ out of love. ***"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*** (II Pet. 3:18).

CONCLUSION

Have you been touched by the grace of a sovereign God? You can be! The Bible says, "For by grace have you been saved through faith..." God's grace is the cause which moves upon a person to give him the ability to trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

Salvation is not of works but grace and is appropriated through faith in Christ. The Bible says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith - not of works lest any man should boast." The whole of salvation is a gift from God.

Have you received this gift? All you have to do is trust Christ, receive the gift of Christ, yield to Christ as Lord! The Bible says, "For by grace are you saved through faith!"