

Colossians Study 5: Chapter 4

Introduction

Paul concludes his instructions to specific groups, and then after some general instruction spends the final part of the letter with greetings to and from brethren in Rome and Asia Minor.

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Greetings to the brethren

Homework and preparation for next week:

- Read the letter to Philemon in preparation for next week.
- Read the notes as a review of the study
- *Read 4:6 from several translations. How does the balance of “grace” and “salt” work together to make conversation more appealing? How can you apply these things to our every day situation?*

Notes for study 5: Chapter 4

Introduction

Paul concludes his instructions to specific groups, and then after some general instruction spends the final part of the letter with greetings to and from brethren in Rome and Asia Minor.

Body of the Study

Message to “masters”

Paul continues his instructions to various “groups” of people (those with different roles), by addressing “masters”. The application is specific directed to masters with slaves, but is equally applicable to anyone in a position of power over others – such as employers.

Whilst servants have obligations to those they serve (and in the Roman world, very few rights), masters also have obligations. The servants are to work as if the master they were serving is the Lord, and in the same way, the masters must treat their workers as they would want to be treated by the ultimate master.

Paul encompasses the principle of treating others as you would want to be treated – embracing the principle of equality. The master – servant principle is particularly relevant to the situation in Colosse, as Onesimus (a slave who was a christian) had run away from his master Philemon (also a christian) and had landed at Paul’s house in Rome. Whilst Onesimus has obligations to serve Philemon, so too does Philemon in treating Onesimus equitably.

Our christian duty

The discussion turns from specific instructions (husbands, wives, children, servants, and masters), to general instructions that are applicable to every christian in every circumstance.

“...*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful...*” (4:2 NIV) requires a continuous, attentive, and active adherence. It is translated “...*Continue earnestly in prayer...*” in the NKJV, which brings out both the continuous nature and the diligence required. By way of clarity, Paul adds “...*being vigilant in it...*” (4:2 NKJV). However, prayer should not be drudgery, and we are to do it actively, continuously, and diligently “...*with thanksgiving...*”

Paul specifically requests prayers for himself and Timothy. His prayer request is not for personal gratification, nor for relief and release from his situation under house arrest, but rather “...*that God would open to us a door for the word...*” (2:3 NKJV). Paul wants the opportunity and ability to “...*proclaim it clearly, as I should...*” (2:4 NIV). Even though he was *in chains*, Paul’s desire was to serve God to the best of his ability in whatever circumstances he found himself (c/f Phil 4:11-13).

Whilst we have a sense of duty to our brethren, and to serving the Lord, we have a specific duty to take the gospel to the lost. Consequently, we need to “...*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity...*” (4:5 NIV). We must live our lives by way of example to others, and also control our speech “...*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone...*” (4:6 NIV).

Conclusion to the letter

We noted the content of the letter’s conclusion in the introductory study. In his usual style, Paul sends news from the brethren who are with him, and greetings to those in Colosse. There are a

number of brethren with Paul in Rome, and we can see that he would have been very busy between his letter writing, and the time that he spent with the brethren.

Tychicus

Tychicus came from Asia (Acts 20:4) and may have been known to the brethren in Colosse. In Eph 6:21 he is described as “...*Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord ...*” (NIV). Here he is “...*a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord...*” (4:7 NKJV). Paul sends the letter to Ephesus with him, as well as the letter to Colosse. Paul had previously accompanied him to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), and obviously has a strong connection and regard for him.

Paul has heard (obviously from Onesimus) about how things are going in Colosse. If we *read between the lines*, we might suspect that there was a problem that caused him to run away from Philemon, and perhaps that problem arose from something that was going on in the church? Paul would have heard only one side of the story from Onesimus, and so he sends Tychicus for the “...*very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts...*” (4:8 NKJV). When he comes to them he would pass on all of the details and news about Paul (4:7).

Onesimus

Onesimus was being sent back to Colosse with Tychicus. Paul describes him as “...*a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you...*” (4:9 NKJV). He was (apparently) converted by Paul, probably whilst he was in Rome (Phm 10). We will discuss this more fully in the next study – on the letter to Philemon.

Aristarchus

Aristarchus is described as “...*my fellow prisoner...*” (4:10), which could mean a physical prisoner like Paul, or more likely could be read as a *spiritual prisoner* – bound to Christ. He came from Thessalonica in Macedonia, and had been arrested in Ephesus at the time of the riot (Acts 19:29). He also accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

Mark

John Mark is a close relative of Barnabas. The NIV and the NKJV says “cousin” whilst the KJV says “sister’s son to Barnabas”, and the RSV has “cousin”. The Greek word *anepsios* is used only here in scripture, and comes from the root word for “brood”. Literally it means *a close relative*, which could be read into any of the translations.

He was with Paul in Rome, even although they had previously had a falling out after he departed from him and Barnabas in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13; 15:37-39). There was obviously a distinct possibility that Mark would come to visit the brethren in Colosse, and Paul says “...*if he comes, welcome him...*” (4:10). The brethren had “...*received instructions...*” about him, but we do not know what they were, or who they were from. We could infer that his departure from Paul in Pamphylia had left him with somewhat of a negative reputation, and Paul wants to make sure that the brethren understand that Paul has no such view of him, and that he is to be welcomed with the full assurance of a brother.

Jesus called Justus

We know nothing more about him other than what is stated here, and therefore only that he was one of Paul's companions and fellow workers in Rome. All of the above were Jewish – "...of the circumcision..." (4:11 NKJV).

Epaphras

Epaphras was "...one of you..." (4:12), and therefore came from Colosse. The fact that he is not listed with the other Jewish brethren shows that he was in fact, a Gentile. Further to this, he came from the Gentile territory of Colosse. He was also in Rome with Paul, but had not forgotten his brethren in Colosse "...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God..." (4:12 NKJV).

Paul praises him for his "...great zeal for (the Colossians), and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis..." (4:13 NKJV).

Luke

"...the beloved physician..." was with Paul, and it was almost certainly at this time that he was writing the Acts narrative – as evidenced by its closure at the time that Paul concludes his first Roman imprisonment. It is from Paul's very brief reference here that we learn that Luke was a physician, and from the listing separate from the Jews, that he was a Gentile. Such a brief, incidental, statement sheds much light on Luke's writings, and explain the great detail that he places in his two treatise accounts (the gospel of Luke, and the book of Acts). He also uses medical terms to describe certain conditions in his writings, and together with Paul's description here confirm his authorship of the accounts.

Demas

Demas was with Paul, and he may have lived in Rome. Later, in Paul's second imprisonment, he fled from Rome, and went to Thessalonica. Paul writes "...Demas has forsaken me and has fled to Thessalonica, having loved the present world..." (2 Tim 4:10).

Greetings to the brethren

Paul sends specific greetings to some of the brethren in Asia Minor, notably those in Laodicea. Paul had already written an epistle to them, and makes reference to it here. The Colossians were to ensure that the current letter was read by those in Laodicea, as well as making sure that the church in Colosse got hold of a copy (or perhaps the original) of the letter that he had written to Laodicea. The phrase "...the letter from Laodicea..." (4:16) simply refers to the fact that that was where the Colossians would receive the letter from.

In the final verse, Paul makes a "...salutation by my own hand..." (4:18) His letter was written by a scribe, in this case probably Timothy. The handwritten note at the end gave it the authenticity of the apostle. He adds: "...Remember me in my chains..." which shows how much a burden his imprisonment was causing him, and then adds "...Grace be with you. Amen..." (4:18 NKJV).