

Colossians Chapter 4 v 7 - 18

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[0 : 00] As far as I know, for the last time, at least for some time, and so we're into chapter 4, and we've been going through this very helpful, isn't it, been helpful letter, so full of Christ, but also so full of very clear instruction about living the Christian life, and about how we relate to one another within our circles of marriage and church and so on, and great encouragements, and particularly last week we saw there, verses 2 to 6 of chapter 4, the way in which Paul encourages us about how we live in the world, how do we live as Christians with those around about us who don't know this wonderful good news, and how important it is that our lives are attractive, showing the reality and the power and the outworking of the gospel too.

And so we come to his, what's been titled there, Final Greetings, verses 7 through to the end of the chapter, the end of the letter, verses 7 to 18.

Let's hear God's word. I'm sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances, and that he may encourage your hearts.

He's coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

You've received instruction about him. If he comes to you, welcome him. Jesus, who is called Justice, 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.

[2 : 11] 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. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. 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.

Tell Archippus, see to it that you complete the work you've received in the Lord. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Well, let's come to the Colossians 4, and in verses 7 to 18, if you'd like to have that part of the Bible open, that will be a help as we consider some of the things that Paul has to say as he closes this letter to the church at Colossus.

[3 : 34] If you go back, of course, into the Gospels, and you read about the disciples, those first disciples who Jesus chose to be his followers and ultimately his apostles, in anybody's estimation, they were pretty much a wrong lot, a rag-tag bunch of men.

They were diverse. There was a tax collector, hated by the Jews. There were fishermen, two brothers, two pairs of brothers. There was a radical extremist, and there was a traitor in their midst. Yet in those 12 men, there was in embryo the church. The church as it was and what it would be in all succeeding generations.

So the church is the living manifestation of God's manifold grace. The church is a spectrum of people from every class, every race, every ability.

And the wonder of the church is that in Christ, those who are so ununitable are united. Those who are so completely contrary to one another are brought together into one people, one nation, one body, one church.

[4 : 58] That's the very evidence and the power of the gospel. And that's why Christ, in saving us and putting us together in a local church, has purposed that we should be the manifestation of this manifold, this marvelous, this spectrum of God's grace.

grace. Now as we come to the end of this letter of Paul, we see again this diversity within Christ, within the church.

We see it clearly in the list of these people who Paul includes in his final greetings, either sending greetings to or sending greetings with.

And they really are, again, people of very different shades, shapes, and sizes. Particularly, we see here how the church is a unity of divided people.

Particularly, we notice both Jew and Gentile. Notice at the end of verse 11, after he's spoken about this man, Jesus, he calls him also justice so that we might differentiate him from the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 14] But it was a common enough name, it meant simply Joshua. in the Greek. He sends his greetings and then Paul says, these are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God.

The others, of course, therefore, are Gentiles. Until the coming of Christ into the world, the church of God, the people of God, consisted only of those who were descendants of Jacob's 12 tribes, the 12 sons.

there were a few, Rahab and Ruth, who sort of snuck in under the radar into the extended family, but they were few and far between. There was an exclusivity about the people of God.

And God had done that. It was his purpose, it was his plan. To bring it out, as it were, from the mass, a special people, a particular people, for his glory.

But when Christ came into the world, he came with a distinct mission of removing the barriers and the separation between Jew and Gentile.

[7 : 25] So that whatever anybody's lineage or descendancy, they could have an equal share in the delights of belonging to the living of God.

Paul makes this plain as he details it to the Gentile Christians in Ephesians. Just listen for a moment. Remember that formerly you who were, you who are Gentiles by birth, called the uncircumcised, but those who call themselves the circumcision.

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace who has made the two one, has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.

[8 : 35] He came and preached peace to those who are far away and peace to those who are near, for through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. God had raised that barrier between Jew and Gentile to show that his people were special, but it was God himself who took that barrier down in the person of Christ as he ushered in the new covenant, bringing in just one church, one people, Jew and Gentile alike.

Another barrier that existed between people that Christ has again brought down is that barrier or that difference between male and female.

We were created by God as male and female, created that we might be different and yet compatible, that we might help one another, that we might be united to one another, but because of sin in the world, inequality sprang up between the sexes and still remains today.

Today is World Woman's Day, if you didn't know that, a day to recognize the great disparity between men and women that still exists in many parts of the world.

It's sin that causes that inequality, sin that divides, but in Christ this too is removed so that both men and women are equal partners in the church of Christ with equally vital but differing ministries.

[10 : 06] We have one lady here mentioned in verse 15 of Colossians. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.

God had designed us to be different, but he had designed us to be together and in the church male and female, men and women are brought together in that wonderful way. Paul, as it were, makes this point clear here in Galatians.

He says, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who have baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

You are all one in Christ Jesus. Then we come to that third division then that he already mentions there in Galatians. That division made by man, between men, slave and free.

For we have a slave in these men that are mentioned here. He is Onesimus. If you know anything of his story, then you will know that Onesimus was a runaway slave.

[11:16] You can read about him in Philemon, the little letter just before Hebrews. It's a wonderful letter. In fact, it was almost certain that Onesimus took that letter with him when he went to Colossus because he was from there.

As Paul says, he's one of you. And he took that letter to his master, Philemon, on Paul's account. Telling of how Onesimus, on the run, a slave who could have faced the death penalty, bumps into, by God's grace, Paul, who shares the gospel good news with him so that he becomes a Christian. Slave and free. A man who had no rights, no privileges in the world, who was owned, bought, sold, disposed of as his master saw fit.

But then at the other end of the spectrum, we have not only many who are free, but we have people like Luke, our dear friend, the doctor. We know so much about Luke, don't we?

He's the one who gave his name to that gospel of Christ's life. He's the one who wrote the book of Acts. He was a close traveling companion with Paul, faithful, always there, a dear, dear friend.

[12:43] But think about it. What would a man like Luke, an educated, professional man have to do with or want to be with in the presence of a runaway slave like Anisimus?

But here's the power of the gospel in action. The extremes of society, the extremes of class are brought together. Whatever divisions man makes, whatever divisions there are between us, they are dissolved by the spirit of Christ.

Every church, every local church is to be an expression of their community. We must do all that we can to prevent our church becoming a clique.

We must do everything we can to be a church that represents all the spectrum of our community, not just one class or one type of education or one sort of people or one color or whatever it may be. Class has no place in the church of Jesus Christ except where there is diversity in it so that it may exalt the uniting power and grace of the gospel. So here in this little mini picture, portrait of God's people we see that those divisions that are set up are removed.

[14:06] That those who were once outside are brought in. That those who were once enemies are reconciled. That those who were once competitors striving against one another run together in the race of God.

Another essential characteristic of the local church that we find here is this, that there is a variety of gifts and ministries. Not just a variety of different types of people and class and social spectrum and race but a variety of gifts and abilities.

in the Bible one of the great illustrations that is given about the church of Jesus Christ is that picture of the human body.

Different parts essential for the effective usefulness and health of that body. Here's Paul writing in 1 Corinthians and chapter 12.

Listen again to his words. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

[15:17] And if the ear should say because I am not an eye I don't belong to the body it would not be for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be?

If the whole body were an ear where would the sense of smell be? In fact God has arranged the parts in the body every one of them just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part where would the body be?

As it is there are many parts but one body. And so he concludes now you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.

So here in this list of different people we find differing various gifts and ministries that each one performs. He begins with Tychicus.

He had been a great fellow traveller and worker with Paul and notice how he describes him dear brother faithful minister fellow servant he seems to be a real all rounder a man of great gifting great ability able to turn his hand to all sorts of ministry and service for the Lord and yet here he is acting as Paul's postman doing what may be certainly an arduous task maybe you might think a menial

unimportant task carrying a letter from Paul to Colossus he and Onesimus are faithful witnesses bringing the news of what God has been doing in Paul's life and in the church to which they're associated faithfulness to the task assigned is much more important than the task itself we need to understand that say it again faithfulness to the task

[17:11] God has assigned us is much more important than the task itself it may be something great it may be something in our eyes small but if we are faithful to it that is what counts and notice how Paul speaks of him as a fellow servant he speaks about the work that he is doing and in fact Paul again and again mentions work in relation to these dear Christians there in verse 11 he speaks about the fellow workers for the kingdom of God Paul wasn't a one man band he wasn't somebody who said it's all up to me these are just sort of my minions fellow workers co-workers with him and with Christ he talks about Epaphras who is working hard for you and then he talks in verse 17 to Archippus see through it that you complete the work you've received from the

Lord being part of the church of Jesus Christ is being brought into the work of the kingdom of God this is the extraordinary the immense privilege that we have as Christians that God brings us in to work at his work to share in his great ministry of salvation to this world to share in the work of Christ of making known and manifest the love of God it's an awesome and wonderful thing but that's the very reason that Christ saved us he saved us because he has a work for each of us to do here's Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do you have a work dear friends do it faithfully you cannot say none of us can say whoever we are if we are part of this local church

I have nothing to bring I have nothing to give I have no work to contribute every one of us has and so we see not only were those who were like Tychius who were hard workers who were doing the running around as it were for Paul but others had a ministry of comfort Jesus who's called justice sends his greetings these are the only Jews verse 11 and they have proved a comfort to me a comfort to me it's Paul in prison Paul with chains Paul frustrated in one sense because his ministry heart was always to go out to the marketplaces and to tell people of Christ now he's caged he knows it's of God but it's a hardship nonetheless how precious it was to him to be comforted by these believers who took care of perhaps some of his very basic needs brought him food provided for him shared with him how important it is to comfort one another we may feel that by visiting somebody or picking up the phone or chatting to them we're not doing a great deal in the church of God but we are we are we are and then there were those who prayed like Epaphras oh what a man of prayer he is he's one of you again he's from Coloss he's from their home church from their town remember he's the one who back in chapter one we're told was the first Christian in the town who took the gospel to that town and city and shared the gospel God used him to plant the church but after that he didn't sort of say well that's it I've done my bit for them I'll just get on and move elsewhere no he's always wrestling in prayer for you his work wasn't finished as he shared the gospel but his work was to pray prayer is the greatest work that we can do the greatest work that we can do it's not a cop-out it's the least we can do and the best we can do for one another notice that when Paul describes the prayer of epaphras he likens it to hand-to-hand combat and to hard labor that's why we find prayer difficult that's why we find it wearying that's why we don't persevere at times in prayer but we need to epaphras did he's moved to prayer and it seems particularly when we know that the subject of the letter it's clear that epaphras is concerned because there are these false teachers who are seeking to destabilize the church to knock the christians off course potentially to turn them away from from the growing to maturity as god has purposed for them and so he prays that they might stand firm in the will of god mature and fully assured it is good that we pray for one another when we're ill it is good that we pray for the practical needs of one another and the struggles but dear friends how important it is that we pray for one another that we might stand firm how important it is we pray for one another in the battle in which we're engaged as christians that the lord would keep us and enable us to to grow to maturity and assurance if you were to ask me dear friends if you were to come up to me and say what can i do for the church the very first thing that i will say to you is i wouldn't mind a cup of tea no i wouldn't be that it would be pray pray i don't like tea pray and we find others with practical ministries we don't just find these we might call spiritual ministries vital though they are but we find practical gifts here's nympha clearly she has the the gift of hospitality she opens her home her house to the church to god's people to meet in and to use how important such basic service is to the church it's not up front it's not even seen most of the time we her name isn't mentioned in any other place she probably didn't expect that paul would

send her greetings or mention her because she was somebody who just got her sleeves rolled up and just opened her home and was hospitable but dear friends like the foundations of a building though hidden from sight so those gifts and ministries though they are still behind the scenes hold up the whole structure of the church should they be removed it would come tumbling down let us never despise small ministries let us never underestimate one another's gifts let us encourage one another stir one another to use whatever gifts God has given us because they are not insignificant they

are important if you have gifts which you all do and you know that the Lord has called you to this local church use them whatever way the Lord calls you to use them use them just as we find archipus using his in verse 17 complete the work you've received in the Lord it may be that we did serve and we stopped I don't know really none of us know why Paul says what he says to archipus it may be archipus had stopped doing what he was doing perhaps he'd become discouraged perhaps he'd become weary but Paul says to him complete it carry it on persevere the Lord's given it to you dear friends the Lord has given us ministries he won't stop working in us and through us until we're dead so if anybody here is alive and I think there's a few we still have a work to do from the Lord and then as we close there are three final people that we must mention in this letter we haven't gone into the great details about everybody that's not been my purpose really to give all the backgrounds but there are three people here who are mentioned and they need special remembrance and they have a vital lesson to teach us the first of them is there in verse 10 my fellow prisoner

[26 : 15] Aristarchus Paul wasn't alone in the prison there were other Christians who shared in his suffering as well Aristarchus had been along with Tychius and Luke regular traveling companion you look in Luke in Acts and you'll see his name coming up in various places with Paul going from place to place sharing the gospel serving and supporting him we don't know why he himself was also in prison but it certainly had something to do with his faithfulness to Christ and to Paul it's so important dear friends that we do not forget our brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted it's so important we don't forget them that we pray for them that we take some of the newsletters that we can have through Barnabas Fund or through Open Doors or other ministries where we can give to them but most of all where we can pray for them you see they are our brothers and sisters in Christ they are our family in Christ even if we've never met them here's what the writer to the

Hebrews tells us in chapter 13 of his letter he says to them remember those in prisoners if you were their fellow prisoners and those who are ill treated as if you yourselves were suffering who knows what we may have to suffer for Christ in the future and how grateful we would be of those who support us how important to not forget the imprisoned believers but then there is two others and they're significant very significant I believe in the life of the local church the first of them there is Mark the cousin of Barnabas brackets says Paul you've received instructions about him if he comes to you welcome him what's that all about some of you will know this is Mark also called John he had been somebody who had gone along with Paul and Barnabas his cousin Paul we know Barnabas from Cyprus so almost certainly Mark was from Cyprus 2 and he'd gone along with them on their missionary journeys but there came a point where it was just too tough for him the suffering the deprivation perhaps the persecution we don't know why but for some reason while they were in Pamphylia he left them he deserted them he turned away

Paul we read about it Acts tells us about it in chapter 15 sometime later Paul and Barnabas wanted to go and visit the towns that they had preached in and see what the Lord was doing there Barnabas wanted to take John also called Mark with them but Paul did not think it wise to take them because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and did not continue with them in the work he was Mark Mark the restored failure the restored failure the result of his failure in deserting Paul and Barnabas was that in the end they weren't able to work together Barnabas felt a loyalty to Mark wanted to take him with them Paul said no it's not a good idea he's not reliable he can't be trusted we have to just go without him and so they went their separate ways but here he is sometime later mentioned by

Paul as being with Paul possibly he's in prison we don't know it could be that he's there with Aristarchus but what is certain is this at the very least he is serving Paul he is caring for him he's ministering to him his story is one of failure and restoration and it's a story clearly that Paul has told the Colossian Christians about you've received instruction about him perhaps they'd heard about what had happened and was certainly that he deserted them and they thought well who's this Mark

