



# Postscript: “A Note from A Few of My Friends”

[4:7-18]

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*“As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. . . .*

*“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you” (4:7-18).*

The small band of Christians, gathered in Philemon’s great room in Colossae no doubt, eagerly devoured this letter from Paul. At its conclusion, they found Paul closing with the customary greetings a letter of that day would contain. We tend to skip over these verses when we read Paul’s letters, but this is a valuable portion of his writings. In these final remarks we discover what the early church considered to be significant. More than social comments, these reflect real spiritual concern among the brethren.

Eight of Paul’s associates are mentioned in these verses. Not all the places filled by these men were conspicuous, but all were important. Each was cherished by the brethren at Colossae.

Though most of the Colossians had perhaps never met Paul, there were still the inevitable concerns about his health and comfort, about the prospect of his release from prison, about the possibility of his coming to Colossae after his

release. To answer their questions would take more space than Paul had left on his papyrus roll, so he determined to send two men who could bring them up-to-date on his situation (4:7-9).

## THE “BY” FRIENDS (4:7-9)

The first Paul mentioned is Tychicus. This brother was from Asia (Acts 20:4), perhaps from Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:12). He had been part of the delegation sent by the churches with Paul to Jerusalem with the collection for the needy saints of Judea. Later he replaced Timothy in Ephesus and then may have been sent on to Crete (Titus 3:12).

Three phrases give Paul’s assessment of this man: He is a “beloved brother,” a “faithful servant,” and a “fellow bond-servant.” While he may not have had the great talent or training of Paul, he willingly subordinated himself to serve in such a way that Paul could be set free to complete his apostolic tasks. On this occasion Tychicus eagerly agreed to be Paul’s delivery boy, neither a glamorous nor easy position. His willingness reveals his servant’s heart. Delivering this letter meant walking across Italy, sailing across the Adriatic Sea, walking the Egnatian Way across Greece, catching another ship to Miletus, then hiking up the Lycas Valley to Colossae—a long and perilous journey. The church needs more like Tychicus who can serve without basking in the limelight of great successes, men and women who can be counted on to do whatever needs to be done to help the cause of Christ in the community.

Traveling with this young preacher was Onesimus. His story is recounted in the “postcard” Paul sent to Philemon with the letter to the Colossians. This man is a brilliant illustration of the reality of the gospel’s transforming power that has been described in this letter.

Once a runaway slave who hated his master, he fled to the anonymity of Rome where he providentially met Paul. Eventually he was saved and now was being sent back to Colossae where he would have a unique ministry among the slaves who undoubtedly constituted the majority of the church’s membership. His new life would put meat on the bones of Paul’s words.

### **THE “FROM” FRIENDS (4:10-14)**

In 4:10, 11, a trinity of Jewish disciples are named whose value to Paul we can never know: Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus, called Justus.

Though Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, his heart was never far from thinking about his own people, Israel. (See Romans 9:1-3.) How disappointing it must have been to see so few of his own brethren according to the flesh respond to Jesus as Messiah. No wonder these three Jewish brothers who faithfully served with Paul were such an encouragement to his heart.

Aristarchus was a Jew with a Greek name (a common practice among hellenized Jews). A Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4), he was probably one of Paul’s own converts. He had been seized with Paul in the riot of the silversmiths at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). He voluntarily traveled with Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2), where he was incarcerated with the apostle.

Aristarchus evidently was the kind of Christian who could be counted on when times were the toughest. In a word, he was a burden-bearer. Though we know little about what this man actually did for the gospel cause, we do know this: He was there when Paul needed him. The church still needs courageous, sensitive Christians who will be alert to signals of distress from other believers and communicate to them: “I am aware of your pain; I am concerned about you.”

The reference to Mark takes us back to Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13). Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Barnabas’ cousin Mark, set out from Antioch to carry the gospel to lands where the name of Jesus was yet unknown. Along the way when things got a little tough John Mark

bailed out and returned to Jerusalem. When Barnabas wanted to take Mark along on the second missionary journey, he and Paul had a falling out and went their separate ways.

How refreshing it is to find now, years later, that a reconciliation has taken place. Mark has matured, and Paul can own up to the possibility that his judgment of Mark may have been a bit hasty. Paul gave Mark another opportunity, and this time Mark succeeded. In his last letter, Paul would tell Timothy: “Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service” (2 Timothy 4:11).

The power of the gospel in human life is such that persons can be brought together again in spite of bitter past experiences. Forgiveness means that no relationship ever need be considered hopelessly ruined.

Jesus, called Justus, was another Jewish believer with a Roman name. History says nothing about this man; he is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. We can say this for him: He was a man who had the courage of his convictions. Having accepted Jesus as his Messiah, Justus stood up among his own people and declared his unwavering faith in that truth. When Paul witnessed so many Jews rejecting Jesus and still others accepting Him only to return later to Judaism because of the influence of false teachers, he was comforted to have Jewish brethren like Justus who stood firm for the Lord.

Three loyal Gentile converts also sent their greeting in this letter (4:12, 13). The first one, Epaphras, we have met before.

In Paul’s postcard to Philemon, he called this co-worker a “fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.” If that is to be understood literally, then Epaphras had also been arrested and was now chained to a Roman soldier day and night for his beliefs. This would explain why he wanted to return to Colossae but could not at the present.

A Colossian himself, Epaphras was the founder of this church. His heart burned for these believers’ spiritual welfare. Unable to go home, he did the next best thing: He prayed earnestly on their behalf.

As you read this letter, you, too, may be separated from loved ones. Perhaps a job transfer has taken you to a new city and you have temporarily left family behind to finish the school year. Maybe a tour of duty in the armed forces has separated

you from family and friends. What can you do in these situations? You can pray for your loved ones. Prayer can release spiritual power and protection in their lives. While you may not know how God is moving in response to your petitions, your prayer must be persevering. God will honor your intercession in His own time.

Greetings also came from Luke, one of Paul's closest companions (4:14). Luke had joined Paul's team at Troas (Acts 16:10) on the second missionary journey and stayed with him from that time on. Apparently, he was not just a doctor but served as Paul's personal physician.

Luke was Paul's last companion in prison (2 Timothy 4:11). To him was given the honor of ministering to Paul in his final hours before Nero ordered his execution. All others had left. Some had deserted; others had gone on missionary campaigns. The years had bonded the hearts of these two Christian brothers. Luke's presence would be enough to encourage Paul as he heard the death sentence pronounced against him.

Paul called Luke the "beloved" physician. Surely that is due in part to the fact that Luke had earned a place of gratitude in the heart of all Christians through his carefully researched and beautifully written history of Jesus and the early church, the Gospel of Luke and Acts. God alone knows the extent of the contribution he made, not only to Paul, but to the church at large.

Last among Paul's co-workers to be mentioned is Demas (4:14). Little is known of this man. That Paul attached no comment of praise about him may be an eloquent silence. Two years later Paul will write to Timothy: "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10).

How strange that his name should be linked in the same verse as Luke's. Of these two men, one was faithful, and the other became faithless. One loved Paul; the other loved the world. One bought up his opportunities; the other sold out.

Paul did not say that Demas forsook the Lord, only that he had forsaken him. That, however, is enough to break a man's heart. When submerged in suffering, disappointment overwhelms us if even our closest friends abandon us. In times like these, God must be enough for us.

#### **THE "TO" FRIENDS (4:15-17)**

At the close of the letter Paul sent his own

greetings and gave some final instruction. Verses 15 and 16 say, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; . . ."

We know nothing of Nympha; there is even uncertainty about the name. The KJV takes the reference to be a man's name, while the NASB understands it to be a woman's. In either case, this Christian's house was open to others for a place of worship, prayer, and encouragement.

Paul mentioned a letter he wrote to the Laodiceans. This letter has been lost unless it is to be identified with the letter to the Ephesians as some have speculated. Some of Paul's correspondence to the Corinthians has also been lost. (See 1 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 2:1-4.) He may have written many other letters no longer preserved for us. Rather than speculate about the contents of such letters, we should study the ones we have!

The last one mentioned was Archippus: "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it'" (4:17). In his note to Philemon Paul called Archippus his "fellow soldier" in the gospel. Some see an indication that he was Philemon's son. This much is certain: Archippus had a ministry and was not being faithful in it. Paul wrote this concluding note to exhort him to accomplish his ministry.

Every Christian is a minister according to the teaching of Scripture. Ministers are not just the "professionals" who are up front on Sunday morning. The church will not have a powerful impact on its community unless all the members fulfill their own ministry by allowing Jesus to live in and through them daily wherever they are, whatever they are doing. When all the members serve as ministers of resurrection life in the community, the church will again witness the Lord adding daily to their number those who are being rescued from an empty way of life.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The letter to the Colossians concludes with a line in Paul's own handwriting. His custom was to dictate to a secretary (cf. Romans 16:22) and then authenticate the letter with his own signature. (See 2 Thessalonians 3:17.) "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you" (4:18).