

Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 18
Colossians 4:7-18 : Topic 9.0

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Greek NT

4.7 Τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τυχικὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σκλάβος ἐν κυρίῳ, 4.8 ὁ ν' ἐπεμψα πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ἵνα γνῶτε τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ παρακαλέση τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, 4.9 σὺν Ὀνησίμῳ τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν· πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὧδε.

4.10 Ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἀρίσταρχος ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου καὶ Μάρκος ὁ ἀνεψιὸς Βαρναβᾶ (περὶ οὗ ἐλάβετε ἐντολὰς, ἐὰν ἔλθῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, δέξασθε αὐτόν) 4.11 καὶ Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰουδῆτος, οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς, οὗτοι μόνον συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, οἵτινες ἐγενήθησάν μοι παρηγορία. 4.12 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ. 4.13 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει. 4.14 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημᾶς. 4.15 Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν. 4.16 καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῇ παρ' ὑμῖν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικέῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῇ, καὶ

Gute Nachricht Bibel

7 Über mein Ergehen wird euch Tychikus ausführlich berichten, der geliebte Bruder und treue Sachwalter, der mit mir zusammen im Dienst für den Herrn steht. 8 Ich schicke ihn gerade deshalb zu euch, damit er euch von uns berichtet und euch Mut macht. 9 Mit ihm zusammen schicke ich den treuen und geliebten Bruder Onesimus, der ja zu euch gehört. Die beiden werden euch alles erzählen, was hier vorgeht.

10 Es grüßt euch Aristarch, der mit mir im Gefängnis ist, ebenso Markus, der Vetter von Barnabas. Seinetwegen habe ich euch ja schon Anweisungen gegeben. Nehmt ihn freundlich auf, wenn er zu euch kommt! 11 Auch Jesus mit dem Beinamen Justus lässt euch grüßen. Diese drei sind die Einzigen aus dem Judentum, die noch mit mir zusammen für die Aufrichtung der Herrschaft Gottes arbeiten. Sie sind mir ein wirklicher Trost geworden. 12 Es grüßt euch Epaphras, der zu euch gehört und im Dienst von Jesus Christus steht. Ständig kämpft er in seinen Gebeten für euch, dass ihr euch als reife Christen bewährt und ganz davon erfüllt seid, in allem den Willen Gottes zu tun. 13 Ich kann bezeugen, wie

NRSV

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him. 11 And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. 13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.

15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church

NLT

7 Tychicus, a much loved brother, will tell you how I am getting along. He is a faithful helper who serves the Lord with me. 8 I have sent him on this special trip to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you. 9 I am also sending Onesimus, a faithful and much loved brother, one of your own people. He and Tychicus will give you all the latest news.

10 Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. And as you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way. 11 Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish Christians among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been! 12 Epaphras, from your city, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident of the whole will of God. 13 I can assure you that he has agonized for you and also for the Christians in Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Dear Doctor Luke sends his greetings, and so does Demas.

15 Please give my

τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε. 4.17 καὶ εἶπατε Ἀρχίππῳ, βλέπε τὴν διακονίαν ἣν παρέλαβες ἐν κυρίῳ, ἵνα αὐτὴν πληροῖς.

4.18 Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου. μνημονεύετε μου τῶν δεσμῶν. ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

viel Mühe und Plage er für euch auf sich nimmt und ebenso für die Glaubenden in Laodizea und Hiërapolis.

14 Es grüßen euch unser lieber Lukas, der Arzt, und Demas.

15 Grüßt die Brüder und Schwestern in Laodizea, besonders Nympha und die Gemeinde in ihrem Haus.

16 Wenn dieser Brief bei euch vorgelesen worden ist, dann schickt ihn nach Laodizea, damit er auch dort vor der Gemeinde verlesen wird. Und lest auch ihr den Brief, den ich nach Laodizea geschrieben habe.

17 Sagt Archippus: Sei treu im Dienst für den Herrn und erfülle den Auftrag, den du erhalten hast!

18 Mit eigener Hand schreibe ich, Paulus, hier meinen Gruß. Vergesst meine Ketten nicht!

Die Gnade sei mit euch!

in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord."

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

greetings to our Christian brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and those who meet in her house. 16 After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them. 17 And say to Archippus, "Be sure to carry out the work the Lord gave you."

18 Here is my greeting in my own handwriting -- PAUL. Remember my chains. May the grace of God be with you.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

With 4:7-18, we come to the *Conclusio* of the letter that contains a variety of elements typically found in ancient letters. Most of the time in Bible study programs this part of a document receives either abbreviated treatment, or none at all, because the allotted time for the study has expired and the study hasn't progressed this far. At first glance, some might be inclined to think that the conclusion of an ancient letter with greetings etc. doesn't contain significantly important material and thus is not especially important to study. But careful examination of this text in Colossians will undercover some real gems of spiritual insight as well as bring to the surface several first century Christian workers and their fascinating stories of ministry. Thus one can benefit both historically and spiritually from studying these verses.

Historical Context:

In verses 7-17, several historical issues arise largely due to the reference to various individuals in relationship to the congregation at Colossae. Foundational to the exegesis of these time and place references is the working hypothesis of a Caesarea Maritima imprisonment of the apostle Paul in the very late 50s of the first Christian century. The individuals with Paul at the time of the writing of the letter -- Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas -- are at Caesarea assisting Paul during his

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

imprisonment. Archippus is in Colossae. The ability of this group of servants of Christ to help Paul at Caesarea becomes clear from the depiction of Luke in Acts 24:23:

Then he [=Felix, the Roman governor] ordered the centurion to keep him [=Paul] in custody, but to let him have some liberty and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care of his needs.²

The freedom that Paul enjoyed as a Roman citizen while in custody enabled him to continue ministry and to benefit from the ministry of fellow Christian workers. Not the least of which was the dictation and composition of the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. In the exegesis section below, the individual circumstances of each of these will be treated further.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects are important here, as is typically true in careful Bible study.

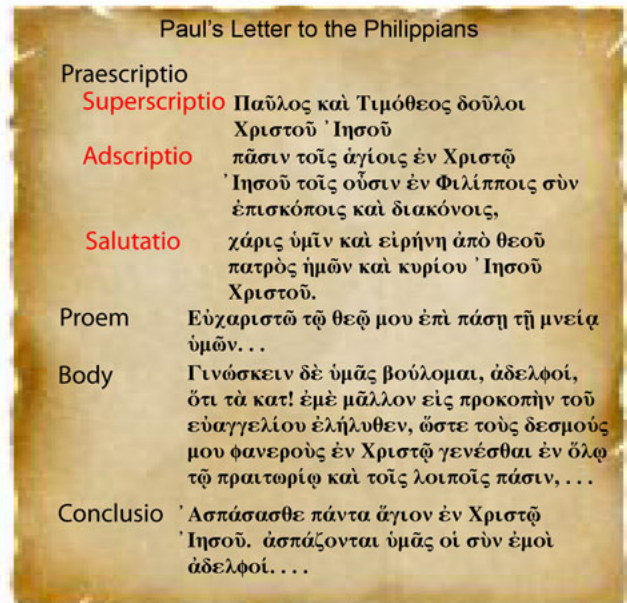
Literary Form:

Col. 4:7-18 form the *Conclusio* of the letter to the Colossians.³ This section of ancient letters could be very brief or relatively long, depending on the circumstances of the individual letter. A wide variety of sub forms can be found in this section not only of the letters inside the New Testament, but of those in the ancient world in general.

In Colossians the material moves from Travel Plans (vv. 7-10 with Tychicus and Onesimus) to Greetings (vv. 11-15). Then instructions about the reading of the letter, v. 16, and specific instructions to Archippus, v. 17, follow. In verse eighteen come then the Letter Verification (v. 18a), Prayer Request (v. 18b), and Benedictio (v. 18c). None of these items are atypical to the Pauline letters; each of them can be found in various Pauline letters. A careful study of this section in the Pauline letters will reveal that no set form or pattern was followed by the apostle. The items included along with their individualized content and the items omitted in each of the letters depended entirely upon the circumstances of each letter. This is consistent with the pattern of letter writing generally in the ancient Greek speaking world.

Travel Plans, vv. 7-10. Paul's description of his travel plans, and/or those of his associates, are not frequently given, but do occur in a few of the letters. Whether they signal the end of the body proper of the letter or an early segment of the conclusion of the letter is debated among scholars with expertise in literary form analysis, i.e., Form Criticism. The most detailed expression in the Pauline letters is found in Romans 15:22-33, and serves as a transition from the letter body to the letter Conclusio. The expression of travel plans will focus on his relationship to the church being addressed in the individual letter.

Greetings, vv. 11-15. In the ancient world expressing greetings both orally and in written form played an important role in establishing close friendships. The word complex from the verb ἀσπάζομαι and the noun ἀσπασμός form the terms designating a greeting.⁴ Given the rather formal nature of friendship, φιλία,



Ancient Letter on papyrus

²GNT: 24.23 διαταξάμενος τῷ ἑκατοντάρχη τηρεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ἔχειν τε ἄνεσιν καὶ μηδένα κωλύειν τῶν ἰδίων αὐτοῦ ὑπηρετεῖν αὐτῷ.

³As in all Pauline letters, the end of the letter is taken up with messages (vss 7–9), greetings (vss 10–15), and brief instructions (vss 16–17). The final greeting written in Paul's own hand, the request to remember the Apostle's bonds, and the wish for grace (v 18) conclude the letter." [Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon a Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon., Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 170.]

⁴The aspasmós in the Epistles. aspázesthai is the most common form of greeting in letters (47 times). It occurs in all the epistles except Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, James, 2 Peter, Jude, and 1 John. Paul seems to have regarded the greeting as very important as an expression of affection. In the imperative the writer may a. ask his readers to present greetings from a distance (Rom. 16:3ff.), b. greet all the members of the church (Phil. 4:21), c. tell the members to greet one another (1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Th. 5:26, which implies that the greeting would include embracing), or d. pass on a greeting to friends (2 Tim. 4:19). In the indicative a. absent individual Christians deliver greetings (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:21ff.: the scribe), b. groups in the church send greetings where there is a special relation (Phil. 4:22; Heb. 13:24), c. the whole church sends greetings, having no doubt

in the ancient world, cultivating and maintaining those friendships was important. Consequently sending greetings stands as the most frequently occurring element in the Conclusia of the Pauline letters.

The nature of a greeting orally was to say, “χαίρειν” to one another.⁵ Additionally, a kiss on the cheek (φιλήμα) was the physical action of greeting.⁶ In Colossians,⁷ Paul passes on the greetings of several associates with him at the time to the church in Colossae, vv. 10-14. Then he sends personal greetings to the church at Laodicea and to Nympha, v. 15. Very likely in the latter instance an embrace with a ‘holy kiss’ is implied. Additionally such a physical embrace could have been done by Tychicus and the others who carried the letter to Colossae, although this is not clear.

Specific Instructions, vv. 16-17. Sometimes the apostle will include specific instructions to the readers of the letter.⁸ In Colossians 4:16-17 requests first that this letter be read to the Laodicean church after being read at Colossae, and that the letter from Laodicea be read at Colossae. Then he asks the church to admonish Archippus to get his work done that God had assigned him.

Letter Verification, v. 18a. Because more formal letters in the ancient world were almost always dictated to a writing secretary by the sender, the custom was for the sender to take pen in hand and add something at the end of the letter in his own handwriting that served to validate the entire letter as coming from him and reflecting his thoughts. Quite often Paul follows this custom and so indicates it in the conclusion of his letters.⁹ In 2 Thess. 3:17b, he indicates that such a custom is standard for all his letters.¹⁰ Although the Colossians did not know Paul personally, and presumably would not recognize his handwriting, one would assume that the mere difference in handwriting at the end of the letter would provide the carriers of the letter sufficient indication to orally verify the genuineness of this letter from Paul.

Prayer Request, v. 18b. Because of the supreme importance that Paul attached to prayer, he sometimes comes to the end of a letter with a request of his readers to remember him in their prayers.¹¹ Also, he occasionally includes a brief prayer for his readers.¹²

Benedictio, v. 18c. The final benedictory prayer is most common in the letters of Paul,¹³ and is usually

asked the apostle to do this (2 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 4:22), d. a general ecumenical greeting is sent (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:16), and e. a special greeting is sent in the apostle’s own hand (2 Th. 3:17; 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18), this being both personal and a mark of authenticity (2 Th. 3:17), but surprisingly not occurring in all of Paul’s letters (though without the aspasmós formula it is perhaps to be found in Gal. 6:11ff.; Rom. 16:17ff.)” [Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 85. S.V. “aspázomai [to greet], apaspázomai [to bid farewell], aspasmós [greeting],” by Hans Windisch, I.

⁵For an early Christian admonition to not verbally express a greeting, see 2 John 10-11 (NRSV): “10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; 11 for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.” (10 εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν καὶ χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε· 11 ὁ λέγων γὰρ αὐτῷ χαίρειν κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς ποιηροῖς.)

⁶Cf. Rom. 16:16 (NRSV): “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (GNT: Ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ.)

⁷Compare the Greetings in the three letters that went together to Colossae:

Philemon 23-24: “23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.”

Col. 4:10-15: “10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions — if he comes to you, welcome him. 11 And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. 13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.

“15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.”

Ephesians: No greetings. Very likely this is due to the circular nature of the letter, and thus its role as a cover letter for Colossians and Ephesians.

⁸Note the following: 2 Cor. 13:11; Rom. 16:1-2, 17-19; Gal. 6:12-17; 2 Tim. 2:21.

⁹Cf. Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17; Col. 4:18.

Twice in the letters of the New Testament the actual writer of the letter is identified by name:

Rom. 16:22, “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.”

1 Pet. 5:12, “Through Silvanus (Latin for the Greek Silas), whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God.”

¹⁰“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.”

¹¹Cf. 1 Thess. 5:25 and Col. 4:18.

¹²Cf. 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; 1 Cor. 16:23; Rom. 16:20b.

¹³Cf. Gal. 6:18, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters, Amen.”

1 Thess. 5:28, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

2 Thess. 3:18, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

1 Cor. 16:24, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

Rom. 16:25-27, a doxology is substituted:

“16:25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages 16:26 but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writ-

distinct from the prayer request made to the readers or offered to God in behalf of the readers. The inclusion of an opening prayer, the Proem, and a closing prayer, the Benedictio, in the majority of the Pauline letters imitated the opening and closing prayers of early Christian worship, which in turn had taken an example from the opening and closing prayers of the Jewish synagogue sabbath worship service.

Literary Setting:

As the Outline of Colossians to the right illustrates, Col. 4:7-18 comes at the very end of the letter. By incorporating a combination of elements into the Conclusio that were appropriate to the targeted readership, the writer could bring his words to his readers to a natural ending. Sometimes the dividing line between the end of the letter body and the letter conclusion is not clearly defined, but the readers could sense, as the materials toward the end of the letter were read aloud to them, that the sender of the letter was moving toward finishing up his words. Sometimes, the apostle would signal a transition with expressions like ΛΟΥΠΌΝ (“Finally”¹⁴) that indicated the last things were coming. But this is not uniformly true as τοῦ λουποῦ in Eph. 6:10 illustrates; here it only signals the last part of paraenesis discussion in vv. 10-20 found in chapters five and six.

Literary Structure:

The block diagram of the original Greek text is important for more clearly understanding the internal connections of the primary and secondary ideas of the passage. The rather literalistic English translation of the text below illustrates visually these relationships:

56 ^{4.7} **All the things about me Tychius will make known to you,**
the beloved brother
and
faithful servant
and
fellow servant in the Lord,
4.8 whom I am sending
to you
for this very thing,
that you may know the things about me
and
4.9 he may encourage your hearts,
together with Onesimus
the faithful
and
beloved brother,
who is from you;
57 **they will make all things here known to you.**

Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2
Superscriptio: 1:1
Adscriptio: 1:2a
Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12
Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20
Reconciliation: 1:21-23
Paul’s Ministry 1: 1:24-29
Paul’s Ministry 2: 2:1-5
Christian Living 1: 2:6-15
Christian Living 2: 2:16-19
Christian Legalism: 2:20-23
Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4
Christian Behavior: 3:5-11
Getting Dressed: 3:12-17
Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1
Husband/Wife: 3:18-19
Father/Children: 3:20-21
Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1
Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9
Greetings: 4:10-17
Closing: 4:18
Letter Validation: 4:18a
Prayer Request: 4:18b
Benedictio: 4:19c

ings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith -- 16:27 to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

Philemon 25, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”
Col. 4:18, “Grace be with you.”
Eph. 6:24, “Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Phil. 4:23, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”
1 Tim. 6:21, “Grace be with you.”
2 Tim. 4:22, “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”
Titus 3:15, “Grace be with all of you.”
¹⁴Cf. 2 Cor. 13:11.

58 ^{4.10} **Aristarchus sends you greeting**

my fellow prisoner
and

Mark

the nephew of Barnabas
about whom you have received instructions,

if he should come to you,
welcome him

^{4.11} and

Jesus

who is called Justus,

who are of the circumcision

59 **these are the only fellow workers**

for the Kingdom of God,
who have been an encouragement to me.

60 ^{4.12} **Epaphras sends you greetings,**

who is from you
a servant of Christ Jesus,

always
agonizing
for you
in his prayers
that you may stand mature

and
fully assured
in every part of God's will.

^{4.13} For

61 **I bear testimony**

about him

that he works very hard
for you
and
for those in Laodicea
and
for those in Hierapolis.

62 ^{4.14} **Luke sends you greetings,**

the beloved physician,
and

Demas.

63 ^{4.15} **Greet the brothers in Laodicea**

and

Nympha

and

the church that meets in her home.

^{4.16} And

whenever this letter is read
before you

64 **make sure**

also
in the Laodicean church
that it is read,

Lord, καὶ παρακαλέσῃ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν. Implied in this is the carrying of the letter to Colossae to be read before the congregation.

Onesimus (Ὀνήσιμος). The references to Onesimus are just two in the New Testament. Note the following assessment:¹⁸

Slave on whose behalf Paul wrote the Letter to Philemon. A slave of Philemon, he had robbed his master and run away from him. He is also mentioned with Tychicus as a bearer of the Letter to the Colossians (Col 4:9), indicating that he came from that region. Paul became acquainted with him, converted him, and developed a close friendship with him (Phlm 10). Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him during his imprisonment because he had been helpful to him (in Greek, Onesimus means “useful”). However, Paul returned the slave to his master, confident that the runaway slave would be received by his former owner as a Christian brother and that Philemon would charge any wrong that Onesimus had done to Paul’s account.

This runaway slave found Christ through Paul and then returned home to Colossae as a beloved Christian brother who has demonstrated faithful commitment to the Lord after his conversion. To be sure, he came back to Philemon, his owner, as a slave, but now also as a Christian brother who had already gained the respect of Paul and his co-workers in Caesarea. What a story of the impact of Christian conversion!

To be sure that the church clearly understands, Paul repeats the mission of *both* these men: “They will tell you about everything here.”

Greetings, vv. 10-15: “10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions — if he comes to you, welcome him. 11 And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. 13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” (4.10 Ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἀρίσταρχος ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου καὶ Μάρκος ὁ ἀνεψιὸς Βαρναβᾶ (περὶ οὗ ἐλάβετε ἐντολὰς, εἰάν τις ἔλθῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, δέξασθε αὐτόν) 4.11 καὶ Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰούστος, οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς, οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, οἵτινες ἐγενήθησάν μοι παρηγορία. 4.12 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλει καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ. 4.13 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει. 4.14 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημᾶς. 4.15 Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν κατ’ οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν.).

Paul now turns to the greetings that were a customary part of both letters and oral expressions. At minimal he expresses the desire that oral greetings be passed on to the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Perhaps also, the physical embrace of a ‘holy kiss’ would be given by those who represented the apostle in bringing the letter to the believing communities, and in reading it to them. What may have been spoken beyond the standard “χαίρειν” is not known. I suspect a summation of the individual circumstance of each of these sending their greetings through the letter was a part of saying ‘Hello’ to the churches. But by officially sending a greeting each individual let the church know of their ongoing and deep interest in what God was doing in the Lycus Valley. Bonds of Christian friendship were strengthened, in the physical absence of these men.

Greetings from others to the church:

Six individuals were serving with Paul during his imprisonment at Caesarea. The first three -- Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus -- are identified as Jewish: “These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God” (οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς, οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ). Presumably the last three -- Epaphras, Luke, Demas -- are Gentile believers.

Aristarchus (Ἀρίσταρχος). Mentioned several times in the New Testament, an interesting profile of him emerges:¹⁹

Companion of the apostle Paul; Macedonian from Thessalonica, possibly of Jewish ancestry. He is first mentioned as one of those seized by an angry mob in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Later he accompanied Paul on the return from his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4) as well as to Rome to face Caesar (Acts 27:1–2). Paul described him as a coworker (Phlm 24) and fellow prisoner from whom he received great comfort (Col 4:10–11).

Tradition says that Aristarchus was martyred in Rome under Nero.

¹⁸Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 977. S.V., “Onesimus.”

¹⁹Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 109. S.V., “Aristarchus.”

Aristarchus here is only listed as a “fellow prisoner” (ὁ συναιχιμάλωτός μου²⁰) of Paul in Caesarea, and a fellow worker (συνεργός) in Phlm. 24. The picture emerges of a dedicated servant of God who stood with Paul in good times and bad.

Mark (Μάρκος). The story of Mark is most interesting, as Jeffrey Tucker notes:²¹

An early Jewish Christian who, in canonical literature, is identified explicitly as a companion of Barnabas and Paul, implicitly as a companion of Peter, and who, in later tradition, came to be regarded as the author of the Gospel of Mark. The NT provides few facts about John Mark, called by both his Jewish (Gk. Ἰωάννης, from Heb. yōhānān) and Roman (Gk. Μάρκος, from Lat. Marcus) names only in Acts (12:12, 25; 15:37).

John Mark was the son of Mary, at whose house in Jerusalem Christians gathered for prayer, and to whose house Peter came after his rescue from prison (Acts 12:12). After Barnabas and Paul elected to have John Mark accompany them on their journey, for some unexplained reason he parted from their company in Cyprus and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Paul refused to take John Mark on the next journey, even though Barnabas wanted him to come (Acts 15:37), and this resulted in a parting of the ways: Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas traveled to points in Asia Minor (vv. 39–41).

Paul himself does not speak of those events, but in two letters attributed to him and supposedly written from Rome Paul refers to “Mark the cousin of Barnabas” (Col. 4:10) and a “Mark” as being one of his fellow workers (Phlm. 24). That these references are to the same person, John Mark, is not implausible—evidence enough for some scholars to conclude that John Mark and Paul reconciled their differences prior to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.

A Mark is mentioned in two other NT epistles, but because both letters are regarded as pseudepigraphs by many scholars, it is less than certain that these are trustworthy references to John Mark. 2 Tim. 4:11 builds upon the more reliable tradition that John Mark was a companion of Paul, while 1 Pet. 5:13 reflects the later tradition that a Mark was a companion of Peter, his “son” in the spiritual sense, in Rome (“Babylon”). Although it cannot be established that the latter is a specific reference to John Mark—who, it can be inferred from Acts 12, knew Peter—early church tradition clearly assumes that all the NT passages name the same figure.

According to Eusebius (HE 3.39.15), Papias repeated the tradition that Mark served as Peter’s “interpreter” in Rome and that he recorded the Apostle’s recollections of the Lord’s words and deeds. However, this is not adequate proof that John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. Other church traditions claim that Mark was the first to evangelize Egypt and the founder of Alexandrian Christianity. Later legends depict Mark’s martyrdom and reburial in Venice. That John Mark is the “young man” of Mark 14:51, and that both the Last Supper and the events of Pentecost occurred in his mother’s home, are pure conjectures.

Identified in Acts as John Mark, but only as Mark elsewhere in the New Testament, he had an interesting relationship with the apostle Paul. That relationship underwent a severe strain because of Mark’s leaving the missionary group on the first missionary journey. But by the writing of this letter a little over a decade later, Mark and Paul have reconciled their differences, and he is now serving with Paul, and continued to do so through the mid 60s according to 2 Tim. 4:11. Additionally, he developed a strong relationship with the apostle Peter (cf. 1 Peter 5:13) so that Peter speaks of him as “my son” in the Lord (ὁ υἱός μου). Out of this relationship came the Gospel of Mark as a reflection of Peter’s recollections of the story of Jesus.

In this letter Paul indicates that special instructions were given to the church to welcome him, if he came with the group to Colossae: “concerning whom you have received instructions — if he comes to you, welcome him” (περὶ οὗ ἐλάβετε ἐντολὰς, ἐὰν ἔλθῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, δέξασθε αὐτόν). The precise nature of these instructions is not known, as Peter O’Brien comments:²²

At any rate the community has already received instructions about him. If he comes they should welcome him (δέχομαι is the appropriate word for the hospitable reception of a guest or visitor: Matt 10:14, 40, 41; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5, 53; 10:8, 10; John 4:45; Heb 11:31). It is not stated who gave these instructions (ἐντολαί). If they came from Paul himself then the words about the right reception of Mark probably give us the gist of them. But if, as seems more likely, the Colossians had received the communication about Mark from someone else (such as Peter or Barnabas) then Paul is here giving his personal confirmation of the “commandments.” But we cannot be sure; nor do we know whether Mark made his way to Colossae or not.

Mark is identified as a “cousin of Barnabas” (ὁ ἀνεψιός²³ Βαρναβᾶ). This kinship connection to Barnabas ²⁰συναιχιμάλωτος, ου, ὁ (Ps.-Lucian, Asinus 27; Theodor. Prodr. 7, 256 Hercher; Nicetas Eugen. 9, 46; 81) **fellow-prisoner** **Ro 16:7; Col 4:10; Phlm 23.**—DELG s.v. αἰχμή. M-M. TW.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 964.]

²¹David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 861. S.V., “Mark, John,” by Jeffrey T. Tucker.

²²Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 250-51.

²³ἀνεψιός, οὗ, ὁ (Hom. et al.) **cousin** (IG IV2/1, 693, 4 [III A.D.]; ISyriaW 2053c; PLond III, 1164k, 20, p. 167 [212 A.D.]; PTebt 323, 13; Sb 176 ἄ. πρὸς πατρός and πρὸς μητρός; Num 36:11; Tob 7:2; Philo, Leg. ad Gai. 67; Jos., Bell. 1, 662, Ant. 1, 290; 15, 250 al.) Μάρκος ὁ ἀ. Βαρναβᾶ **Col 4:10.** JKalitsunakis, Mittel-u. neugriech. Erklärungen bei Eustathius 1919, 42ff.—β. Page 9 of Colossians Study

helps explain his fierce loyalty to Mark at the beginning of the second missionary journey (cf. Acts 15:36-39). Eventually John Mark proved his reliability later on and Paul came to value him as a trusted co-worker.

Jesus Justus (Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰουστὸς). This is the only mention of this individual in the New Testament. Consequently all we know is that he was with Paul at Caesarea, and was of Jewish heritage. In sending greetings to the church, one assumes that he had some connection to the church from past service there. His Jewish name, “Jesus,” was a common name until the second century when it disappears from lists of Jewish names, because of the tension between Christianity and Judaism by this point. Justus was his Greek name, which was relatively common among Judeans and proselytes to Judaism.

Paul stresses that these three men had “been a comfort to me” during his imprisonment: οἵτινες ἐγενήθησάν μοι παρηγορία. These men in the faithful service to Christ had become encouraging²⁴ to the apostle during the days of imprisonment. How God can use the faithfulness of others to encourage is dramatically illustrated here.

Epaphras (Ἐπαφρᾶς). Epaphras was the one who first informed Paul about the Colossians (cf. 1:4-8). Note the profile of him:²⁵

Coworker with the apostle Paul. Epaphras, a native of Colossae, was responsible for the city’s evangelization, as well as that of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Through him Paul learned of the progress of the Colossian church and thus wrote his letter to the Colossians. Paul’s high regard for Epaphras was evidenced by his use of such terms as “beloved fellow servant,” “faithful minister of Christ” (Col 1:7), and “servant of Christ” (4:12), a title of esteem Paul bestowed only on one other person — Timothy (Phil 1:1). Epaphras was in prison with Paul at the time the letter to Philemon was written (Phlm 1:23).

As the ‘home town boy’ who came from Colossae and had evangelized the Lycus Valley after coming to Christ, Paul pays special homage to him for his fervent labor and concern for the people of the Lycus Valley: “12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. 13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.” (4.12 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ. 4.13 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει.). What a witness to one about his love for the people ‘back home.’ Since he was imprisoned with Paul and Aristarchus at the time of the writing of this letter (Philm. 23), it is not clear whether he was able to return with the group bearing the letters to the Lycus Valley.

Luke (Λουκᾶς). Next to John Mark stands Luke in awareness by modern Bible students. Yet so much is not known about him. He is mentioned by name only three times in the New Testament: Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philm. 24.²⁶ He is identified as a physician who is beloved by Paul (Col. 4:14) and one of Paul’s co-workers (Philm. 24). At the very end of Paul’s life, Luke was the one who stood with the apostle (2 Tim. 4:11). Yet from early church tradition he is understood to be the author of the third gospel narrative of Jesus and also of the book of Acts. Note this depiction of him:²⁷

Companion of the apostle Paul; author of the third Gospel and Acts.

Accepting the author of Luke-Acts as Luke the companion of Paul, much can be learned about him from this two-volume work. The preface to the Gospel indicates that Luke was not an eyewitness or immediate disciple of the Lord. Luke states that he had carried out extensive research and had written an orderly account about Jesus.

Luke’s writings have some features not found in the other Gospels. The extraordinary feature of Luke’s work

116; 118. DELG. M-M.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 78.]

²⁴“**παρηγορία, ας, ἡ** (παρηγορέω ‘exhort, console’; Aeschyl. et al.; 4 Macc 5:12; 6:1) **a source of encouragement, comfort** (Aeschyl., Ag. 95; Plut., Per. 170 [34, 3], Mor. 599b; Vett. Val. 183, 9f; 209, 25; Philo, Deus Imm. 65, Somn. 1, 112; Jos., Ant. 4, 195; Kaibel 204, 12 [I B.C.]) of pers. ἐγενήθησάν μοι παρηγορία *they have become a comfort to me* **Col 4:11**.—DELG s.v. ἀγορά. M-M.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 777.]

²⁵ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 431-32. S.V., “Epaphras.”

²⁶**Col. 4:14**, “**Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.**” (ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημᾶς.)

2 Tim. 4:11, “**Only Luke is with me.**” (Λουκᾶς ἐστὶν μόνος μετ’ ἐμοῦ.)

Philm. 24, “**23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.**” (²³Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ²⁴Μάρκος, Ἄρισταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου.)

²⁷Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 829-30. S.V., “Luke (Person).”

is the inclusion of the book of Acts as a sequel to the Gospel. The two books together — Luke and Acts — show the actual fulfilling of the prophecies of Isaiah in the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth. This inclusion of the Gentiles is often referred to as Luke’s universalism or concern for all humanity (Luke 2:14; 24:47). The Gospel of Luke displays a keen interest in individuals, social outcasts, women, children, and social relationships, especially situations involving poverty or wealth. This Gospel has a special stress on prayer and the Holy Spirit, which results in a striking note of joyfulness and praise. These features tell us something about Luke as a person and his understanding of Christianity.

If Luke is accepted as the companion of Paul, then the “we” passages of Acts disclose that Luke was in Philippi (possibly his hometown) when he first joined Paul (Acts 16:10–17). Then he later rejoined Paul when the latter returned to Philippi (20:5–15). Luke then journeyed with Paul on his way to Jerusalem and stayed with Philip at Caesarea (21:1–18). Then, after Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Caesarea, Luke sailed with him to Rome (27:1–28:16).

Further references to Luke in the epistles of Paul (Col 4:14; 2 Tm 4:11; Phlm 1:24) give some valuable information about Luke. Colossians 4:11 and 14 seem to indicate that Luke was a Gentile and a physician. The latter is supported, but not proved, by the interest shown by Luke in medical matters, as in Luke 4:38, 5:12, and 8:43. It is also interesting that early tradition adds that Luke was a physician of Antioch who wrote his Gospel in Achaia and died at the age of 84.

Seemingly from the Col. 4:14 reference Luke was not Jewish, although many see him as a convert to Judaism before coming to Christ. As a physician he most likely was a slave since the majority of doctors in the Roman Empire were slaves. Early church tradition suggests that he had been loaned to Paul by his owner in order to address some of Paul’s ongoing health problems. After Paul’s execution by Nero in the mid 60s, Luke evidently returned to Philippi where the Gospel of Luke and Acts were written.

Through some unknown connection Luke was known to the church at Colossae and thus he sends greetings to the church through the letter.

Demas (Δημάς). The story of Demas is also brief, and rather sad. He is mentioned three times in the New Testament: Col. 4:14; Philm. 24; and 2 Tim. 4:10.²⁸ At the end of the 50s Demas was standing with Paul and the others in Christian ministry. Less than a decade later he had abandoned these Christian leaders to return to Thessalonica more concerned about himself than for the work of Christ. Beyond this nothing is known about him. His brief story in the New Testament illustrates the deceptiveness of this world and how concern for oneself can over ride commitment to serve Christ.

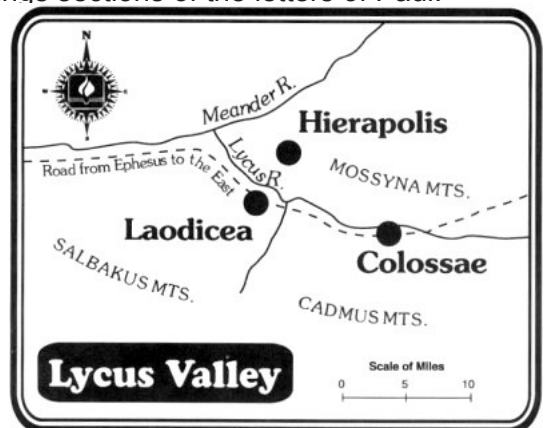
What we learn from the greetings being passed on by these six men in the Colossian letter is a picture of Christian workers serving the Lord together in close bonds of friendship and commitment. They were standing with the apostle Paul in his imprisonment helping him. Through previous connections with the Colossian congregation they were keen to pass on their greetings to the church. Three were Jewish and three were Gentile; but they served Christ as one.

Paul’s Greetings to specific individuals:

After passing on the greetings of his fellow workers, Paul now asks the church to express his greetings to two groups of individuals. This pattern is typical in the greetings sections of the letters of Paul.

Laodiceans (τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς). In regard to the church at Laodicea, Paul requests three things. The first is treated here, while the second and third are treated below under **Special Instructions**:

First, the church in Colossae is to pass on Paul’s greetings to the church in Laodicea (v. 15): “Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea,” (Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς). From the map on the right one can see how close Laodicea was to Colossae. With all three cities located in the Lycus Valley, they were closely linked to one another and the residents easily interacted with one another. The background and history of the city and the church are well described in the



²⁸Col. 4:14, “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.” (ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημάς.)

2 Tim. 4:10, “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” (Δημάς γὰρ με ἐγ-κατέλιπεν ἀγαπήσας τὸν νῦν αἰῶνα καὶ ἐπορεύθη εἰς Θεσσαλονίκην)

Philm. 24, “23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.” (²³Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναϊχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ²⁴Μάρκος, Ἄρισταρχος, Δημάς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συννεργοί μου.)

Largest of three cities and its residents in the broad valley area on the borders of Phrygia, Laodicea stood where the Lycus Valley joined the Meander. Significantly, the western entrance to the city was called the Ephesian Gate. The traveler left the city on the east by the Syrian Gate, for the great road ran to Antioch, where other roads branched to the Euphrates Valley, to Damascus, and to the northeast, where the desert trade routes ran toward the mountains, the Gobi, and the remote lands of the East.

Laodicea was not a natural fortress. The low eminence, on which its Seleucid fortifications stood, might have presented a challenge to invaders, but Laodicea had a serious weakness. The water supply came principally via a vulnerable aqueduct from springs six miles (9.7 kilometers) to the north in the direction of Hierapolis. Fragments of the aqueduct can be seen today, the conduit badly narrowed by thick deposits of calcium carbonate. A place with its water so exposed could scarcely stand a determined siege. The double conduit was buried, but it was not a secret that could be kept.

With the Roman peace, Laodicea lost all of its frontier character. Under Rome, the city grew in commercial importance. Cicero traveled that way in 51 BC on his way to the provincial governorship of Cilicia, and the fact that he cashed drafts in Laodicea shows that the city had outgrown neighboring Colossae and was already a place of financial importance and wealth. One product was a glossy black wool, and the strain of long-haired black sheep bred for the trade were common until the 19th century. The wool was the basis of a textile industry centered in both Colossae and Laodicea. Various types of Laodicean garments are listed in Diocletian's price-fixing edict of AD 300, a copy of which recently came to light from neighboring Aphrodisias.

Laodicea had a medical school. The names of its physicians appear on coins as early as the principate of Augustus. It was probably the medical school of Laodicea that developed the Phrygian eye powder, famous in the ancient world. It is a fair guess that this was the dried mud of the Hierapolis thermal springs, which could be mixed with water to form a kaolin poultice, an effective remedy for inflammation.

It can be readily seen how these features of the city provided the pattern for the scornful imagery of Revelation 3:17–18: "You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy gold from me — gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see" (NLT). The black garments exported all over the Mediterranean world, the famous eye ointment, and the city's wealth form a basis for the writer's stinging reproaches.

Mentioned only four times in Colossians and Revelation, the picture of the church is mixed. In the late 50s at the time of the writing of Colossians, the church has a positive image of spiritual life. But by the end of the century when Revelation is written, the church had grown spiritually indifferent and came under severe criticism by the Lord.

Paul was anxious to greet the congregation in Laodicea.

Nympha (Νύμφα). In addition to the Laodicean congregation, Paul asked that special greetings be given to a Nympha along with the house church group that met in her home. Little is known about this person.³⁰ But she did sponsor a group of believers in Colossae who came together for worship and fellowship. During the first three centuries Christian groups met primarily in private homes,³¹ since owning property was not possible until Christianity gained legal status in the Roman Empire -- something that

²⁹Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 799-800. S.V., "Laodicea, Laodiceans."

³⁰"καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν. 'And Nympha and the church that is in her house.' It cannot be determined with certainty whether the greeting to Νύμφαν, (Nympha) refers to a man (Νυμφᾶς, Nymphas, an abbreviated form of Νυμφόδωρος, Nymphrodorus; cf. Epaphras for Epaphroditus) or to a woman whose name was Νύμφα (Nympha). Since the earliest manuscripts had no accents by which the masculine and feminine forms might be distinguished, the only ancient evidence lies in the personal pronoun which follows: "in her/his/their house": (κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς/αὐτοῦ/αὐτῶν) — the manuscripts vary considerably (see the textual note above), but on balance it appears preferable to understand the reference to a woman and render the whole phrase: 'Nympha and the church that is in her house.'" [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 256.]

³¹"House-churches (on the meaning and use of ἐκκλησία see 57–61), are often mentioned in the NT letters. On occasion a whole congregation in one city might be small enough to meet in the home of one of its members, and it must be remembered that it was not until about the middle of the third century that early Christianity owned property for purposes of worship (see O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*. Tr A. S. Todd and J. B. Torrance [SBT 10; London: SCM, 1953] 9, 10). In other places house-churches appear to have been smaller circles of fellowship within the larger group. In addition to Nympha's house in Laodicea we know that in Colossae Philemon's house was used as a meeting-place (Phlm 2). At Philippi Lydia's home seems to have been used in this way (Acts 16:15, 40) while at Corinth Gaius is described as "host ... to the whole church" (Rom 16:23, the qualification "whole," ὅλη, would be unnecessary if the Christians at Corinth only ever met as a single group and implies that smaller groups also existed in the city; cf. 1 Cor 14:23). Aquila and Priscilla extended the hospitality of their home to house groups in the successive cities where they lived, e.g., in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19) and Rome (Rom 16:5). Concerning the details of these house churches we know little (note Banks, *Idea*, 45–50, and 226, 227, for further bibliographical details)." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 256-57.]

happened only after Constantine became the first Christian Roman emperor.

From Colossians and Philemon we know of at least two house church groups in Colossae. Perhaps -- and probably -- there were additional ones scattered about in the town.

The challenge of this way of functioning as a congregation in the first century world is to remind us that the church is people, not property. Although having a building has definite advantages, the building must never become the church in the thinking of the people. The emphasis must always remain on people who make up the church.

Specific Instructions, vv. 16-17: “16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, ‘See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.’” (4.16 καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῆ παρ’ ὑμῖν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῆ, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε. 4.17 καὶ εἶπατε Ἀρχίππῳ, Βλέπε τὴν διακονίαν ἣν παρέλαβες ἐν κυρίῳ, ἵνα αὐτὴν πληροῖς.).

Instructions regarding Laodicea. The second and third matters pertaining to the church at Laodicea are mentioned here:

Second, the Colossian letter was to be read aloud to the church at Thessalonica (v. 16): “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans;” (καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῆ παρ’ ὑμῖν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῆ.). Paul wants the Colossians to pass this letter -- most likely a copy of it -- to the Laodiceans so it can be read to them as well. Very likely Tychicus and the others bringing the letter to Colossae would be responsible for this with the approval of the Colossian church to share the letter with others. Probably also the Ephesian letter and perhaps Philemon, which were bundled together with Colossians, were treated the same way.

Third, a Laodicean letter was to be read to the Colossians (v. 16): “and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea” (καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε). This is the most difficult of the three requests to understand, since we have no “Letter to the Laodiceans” in the New Testament.³² Very likely

³²“Third, they are to obtain a certain letter from Laodicea and have it read publicly in church at Colossae. Much ink has been spilled, to little purpose, endeavoring to determine what this “letter from Laodicea” (τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας) actually was: (a) several of the early church fathers (Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret) together with many other later writers including Beza, supposed this to have been a letter written from Laodicea to Paul. But by far the most likely meaning of the phrase is that the Colossians were to procure the letter from Laodicea (so Robertson, Grammar, 600, BDF para. 437), an interpretation clearly supported by the context (so Dibelius-Greeven, 52, who considers the expression is from the standpoint of the Colossians and note Abbott’s comments, 304, 305; ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς, “that you too,” corresponds to the previous ἵνα καὶ, “that also,” which refers to the Laodiceans reading the Colossians’ letter; the parallelism implies that the Laodiceans, like the Colossians, will have received a letter, cf. Moule, 138, Bruce, 310, Loymeyer, 170, Anderson, JBL 85 [1966] 436, 437, Lohse, 174, 175, Martin, NCB, 138, and Schweizer, 179). (b) Marcion identified this letter with the Epistle to the Ephesians (a connection made in 1707 by John Mill and which received abundant support from Lightfoot, 272–98; note also J. Rutherford, “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Laodiceans,” ExpTim 19 [1907–08] 311–14). However, Ephesians was almost certainly written after Colossians, and not simply to one church in the province of Asia. If it was written after Colossians, then it is unlikely to have been mentioned in Colossians, unless 4:16 is a later addition but of this there is no evidence (Marcion’s Apostolic Canon gave the title “To the Laodiceans” to the Epistle to the Ephesians, perhaps because it lacked the words “at Ephesus” in the first verse and he found what appeared to be a pointer to its destination in Col 4:16, so Bruce, 310, 311, following Souter). (c) The Epistle to Philemon has been identified with the “epistle from Laodicea,” (J. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, 2nd ed. [London: Collins, 1960] 38–47), but this letter was private (see the full discussion of this point) and the delicacy of its appeal would be destroyed if Paul directed it to be read in public. Further, Philemon lived at Colossae (according to Col 4:9 Onesimus is a slave of Philemon at Colossae) not Laodicea. (d) No extant Pauline letter seems adequately to fit the description and so we are left with the conclusion that the letter to the Laodiceans has not survived (the reference to a letter not obviously included in the canon led, at a later date, to the fabrication of the apocryphal “Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans,” which was made up of sentences gleaned from other Pauline letters; cf. the detailed treatment of Lightfoot, 272–98, Hennecke-Schneemelcher 2, 128–32).

Perhaps it perished accidentally (P. N. Harrison, “Onesimus and Philemon,” ATR 32 [1950] 268–94, suggested it may have been destroyed during the earthquake in the Lycus valley of A.D. 60–61; Schmauch in the Beiheft to Lohmeyer’s commentary, 85, considers the letter was meant for a splinter group of the Laodicean church which resided at Colossae and was destroyed once the church at Laodicea was united—but there is no evidence for this) and was not the only Pauline letter to have been lost (according to the most natural reading of 1 Cor 5:9 Paul had written an earlier letter to the Corinthians which has not survived).

Perhaps the Laodicean church required a letter along similar lines to the Epistle to the Colossians; yet the two were sufficiently different for Paul to direct that each letter should be read in the other church (Anderson, JBL 85 [1966] 436–40, submitted the view that Epaphras wrote the epistle to the Laodiceans because of his inability to accompany Tychicus on the return to the Lycus valley. Anderson claims we cannot discover a sufficient motive for Paul’s writing the second letter. But this does not mean such a motive does not exist and, furthermore, why does not Paul say it is Epaphras’ letter?). The philosophical ideas which were gaining currency in Colossae were probably very much alive in the Lycus neighborhood so that the exchange of both was important.

From this admonition one can understand how Paul’s letters would be copied. Disseminated and collected at an early date (Lohse, 175).”

[Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 257-59.]

this letter has perished so that we have no trace of it. But it evidently contained important information for the Colossians, as well as for the Laodiceans. And Paul wanted it read at Colossae as well as at Laodicea.

Again, much in the fashion of Demas, the church at Laodicea presents a story of a good start that eventually went bad. And largely because of worldliness. Both individual believers and churches can take their eyes of Christ and focus on themselves along with material interests. The result is spiritual disaster.

Instructions regarding Archippus, v. 17: “And say to Archippus, ‘See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.’” (καὶ εἶπατε Ἀρχίππῳ, βλέπε τὴν διακονίαν ἣν παρέλαβες ἐν κυρίῳ, ἵνα αὐτὴν πληροῖς.). Archippus was a leader in the church at Colossae who is mentioned only here and in Philem. 2, as one of the recipients of the letter to Philemon.³³ There he is designated as a ‘fellow soldier’ of Paul. The precise nature of his ministry is unknown.³⁴ Despite it being labeled as διακονία, one should refrain from seeing Archippus as a deacon in the church at Colossae. Instead, it was more general in nature and probably focused on proclaiming the apostolic gospel in Colossae.

Letter Verification, v. 18a: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.” (Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου.). Peter O’Brien’s observations are quite helpful here:³⁵

Having finished dictating, Paul takes up his pen to add a personal greeting in his own handwriting. The apostle always concluded his letters autobiographically even where there is no explicit acknowledgment of it (see Gamble’s recent discussion and interaction with recent epistolary literature, *History*, 76–80, together with his treatment of 2 Thess 3:17). His personal signatures occur frequently (1 Cor 16:21; 2 Cor 10:1; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17 and Philem 19) and were a common epistolary technique in the first century (Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 158, 159). Paul apparently employed the autograph with special nuances: because of a concern that forged letters in his name might be sent to churches or individuals (2 Thess 2:2), to give a quasi-legal commitment with his personal certification (Philem 19), or to add special emphasis to what has been said (so the reference to “large characters” in Gal 6:11).

Thus Paul finished the letter in his own hand writing.

Prayer Request, v. 18b: “Remember my chains.” (μνημονεύετέ μου τῶν δεσμῶν.). The nature of the request is for the Colossians to remember to pray for the imprisoned apostle.³⁶ The request reaches back to 4:3-4 with more details:

3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4 so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

In his closing words, he asked them for prayer.

Benedictio, v. 18c: “Grace be with you.” (ἡ χάρις μεθ’ ὑμῶν.). Just as Paul began the letter with a prayer, he closes it with a short prayer request to God. Note O’Brien’s helpful observations:

ἡ χάρις μεθ’ ὑμῶν. “Grace be with you.” As the opening epistolary greetings or benedictions of Paul’s letters

³³Philemon 1b-2, “To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: “(Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν καὶ Ἀπφίᾳ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ’ οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ)

³⁴“There is no indication that his ministry (διακονία) was that of a deacon (διακονία describes the discharge of service, not the exercise of the office of a deacon, Beyer, TDNT 2, 88), nor that he was to make a collection.

“Merklein (>Amt, 337–40; cf. Zeilinger, Jesus, 185–88), who understands διάκονος (“minister”) and διακονία (“ministry”) as traditional terms within Colossians, considers the ministry of preaching is the service Archippus is to fulfill. It is a ministry he has received in the Lord (παρέλαβες ἐν κυρίῳ; παραλαμβάνω is employed for the receiving of a tradition, see on 2:6) and involves the proclamation of the Pauline gospel (both Merklein and Zeilinger draw attention to the cluster of terms used in this connection: παραλαμβάνω, ‘receive,’ 2:6; πληρῶ, ‘fulfill,’ 1:25; and διάκονος, ‘minister,’ 1:23, 25). As such Archippus is the guarantor to the Colossian congregation that they have received the apostolic gospel (for a qualification of this approach to traditional terms with special reference to Ephras, see the Introduction xlvii–xlix).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 259.]

³⁵Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 259.

³⁶“Rather, one biblical meaning of μνημονεύω is that of calling something to God’s remembrance or of mentioning something to him in prayer (LXX 2 Sam 14:11; Ps 62:6; cf. Ps 6:5; in the NT note the use of μνεῖαν ποιῶμαι, to “make mention,” i.e. in prayer: Rom 1:9; Eph 1:16; 1 Thess 1:2; Philem 4; cf. 2 Tim 1:3; note Bartels, NIDNTT 3, 232, 242, and BAG, 525). Accordingly, these words are essentially a request for their continued prayers on his behalf (see vv 3, 4; Bruce, 313, cf. Wiles, Prayers, 260, who observes that such requests for prayer are frequently found in the closing passages of letters in the Pauline corpus: Rom 15:30–32; Eph 6:18–20; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1–3; Philem 22; cf. Heb 13:18. Gamble, *History*, 81, notes that ‘prayer and remembrance are closely bound up in the Pauline letters’). That is not to suggest, however, that such remembrance could not take other forms as well (note Meyer, 483, Abbott, 307, 308), e.g., interest, concern, etc.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 260.]

are quite stylized so too the χάρις (“grace”) benediction was a frequent and formally consistent element in the conclusions of Paul’s letters. Its uniformity of phraseology, structure and position is clear when a comparison is made (Rom 16:20, 24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Phil 4:23; Col 4:18; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philem 25; cf. Heb 13:25; Rev 22:21). Such a benediction brings the letter to a definitive conclusion and corresponds formally to the final wish of the secular letter (ἔρρωσο, “farewell,” cf. Gamble, *History*, 65–67). The final benediction picks up the introductory greeting (1:2) where Paul desires that the Colossians may apprehend more fully the grace of God in which they stand (cf. Rom 5:2). At the same time the note of confidence is also struck (on the question as to whether the verb which has been omitted is an indicative, ἐστίν, “is,” or optative, εἴη, “be,” see Gamble, *History*, 66, 67, who claims that as a blessing the “grace-benediction” is neither a wish nor a statement but incorporates aspects of both: “Its wish character remains intact, even though qualified by confidence of its effectiveness”). God’s grace will sustain the community, for it is by grace alone that they will stand.³⁷

Thus we finish our eighteen session study of Paul’s letter to the Colossians on a positive note of a prayer wish for the grace of God. Although never having personally visited the church beforehand, the apostle composed a profoundly insightful expression of what it means to be Christian and to be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He warned his readers to steer clear of the ‘religion of the flesh’ that substituted phoney visions and man-made rules and regulations for the apostolic gospel of Jesus Christ. In, through, and based upon the exalted, resurrected Christ do believers have their spiritual existence -- both individually and collectively as the body of Christ. And in Christ we have absolutely everything we need to live life and to please Almighty God. Out of this relationship comes the parameters of moral and ethical living that reflect the holiness of the God we worship and serve. And these guidelines cover relationships inside the church, inside the family, and with the surrounding world. At the end of the letter we catch a glimpse into a group of devoted Christian leaders serving along side the apostle Paul and sharing his compassion for the people of God, and for those in the Lycus Valley especially.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) How trustworthy are you to share news about fellow believers in God’s service?

- 2) How important are greetings to other believers?

- 3) Do you spend much time reading the Word of God?

- 4) How close do you feel to the members of your congregation?

- 5) How many devoted servants of Christ do you know? Are you one yourself?

- 6) Do you remember to pray for others? Especially those in urgent need of God’s help?

³⁷Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 260.