

Paul's Companions

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(Colossians 4:7-18)

We have followed the apostle Paul's flow of thought from the beginning, and here in this final passage we will see Paul change the subject to include personal greetings from several of his trusted companions.

Col 4:7 - As to all my affairs, Tychicus, [our] beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.

Tychicus was the messenger who delivered the letter to the church. He had been one of Paul's companions for several years before Paul's imprisonment in Rome. Tychicus was one of the trusted messengers who helped Paul carry funds collected for the relief effort to the churches in Judea (Acts 20:4), which was probably as much as five years earlier than the writing of Colossians. Tychicus would continue to serve with Paul up until the time of Paul's death about four or five years in the future from the time of Colossians (Titus 3:12; 2 Tim 4:12). Paul provided three important statements about the character of Tychicus:

1. **Beloved brother** is the Greek phrase *agapētos adelphos*. This is Paul's way of saying that Tychicus is dear to him, as well as being a fellow-believer or brother in Christ.
2. **Faithful servant** is the Greek phrase *pistos diakonos*. The noun *diakonos* is often translated as "minister." The adjective *pistos* indicates that Tychicus is faithful in the sense of being reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. In the context Paul is authorizing Tychicus as his official representative for sharing the personal parts of his message to the church at Colossae.
3. **Fellow bondservant** is the single Greek word *sundoulos*, which means "one who serves under the same conditions as another; a servant of the same Lord." Paul is describing the bond of fellowship that he shares with Tychicus in their dedicated service to Christ and the Church.

Paul says that Tychicus will "**bring you information**" which translates the Greek word *gnōrizō* that means "to declare or make known."

Col 4:8 - [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;

There are two main purposes for Tychicus' visit to Colossae. First, Tychicus will share about Paul's circumstances in Rome. The believers need to hear about the status of his case pending before Caesar. Paul's physical health had also been a constant concern, so people would want to know how best to pray for him. People would also want to know more about Paul's plans for continuing his work.

Second, Tychicus will **encourage** (*parakaleō*) which means “to call alongside to strengthen and comfort.” The **heart** identifies the center of a person’s physical and spiritual life. The primary way that believers are encouraged and strengthened is through the ministry of the word of God (Col 1:9, 25-29; 2:2-3; 3:16). Tychicus was fully qualified to carry out that ministry, as we can see from later passages when Paul dispatched him to relieve other ministers. In one case he was sent to Crete to free up Titus (Titus 3:12) and on another occasion Paul sent him to Ephesus, possibly to relieve Timothy (2 Tim 4:12).

In Paul’s day it was more difficult to deliver letters than it is today. The Roman Empire had an official postal service, and their system of roads connected points across the entire empire. Their messenger service was called the *cursus publicus* and it was a state-controlled courier system. The Roman historian Procopius wrote: “The earlier emperors established couriers throughout their dominion. At a day’s journey for an active man they fixed *stages*, and in every *stage* there were forty horses and a number of grooms in proportion. The couriers often covered in a single day as great a distance as they would otherwise have covered in ten.” Unfortunately, the *cursus publicus* was for official use only, so normal citizens would have slaves or acquaintances carry their mail from place to place.

The trip from Rome to Colossae began with a journey of almost 400 miles from Rome to one of the ports in southeastern Italy. Next there was a journey across the Ionian Sea of over 100 miles. Then there was a trek of about 200 miles by land to one of the ports in southeastern Greece. Next was another 200 mile journey across the Aegean Sea to the port of Ephesus or Miletus on the western coast of Asia Minor. Finally, there was a journey by land of about 100 miles to reach Colossae. One reason for selecting Tychicus as the messenger may have been that he was a native of Asia Minor, probably of Ephesus, so he would have known the territory and been acquainted with people along the way who could assist him during the journey.

Col 4:9 - and with him Onesimus, [our] faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your [number.] They will inform you about the whole situation here.

Tychicus was accompanied by Onesimus, a runaway slave from the household of Philemon. We can only speculate about what brought Onesimus and Paul together in Rome. Paul explained to Philemon that while he was confined under house arrest, he led Onesimus to Christ. Paul said, “I appeal to you for *my child* Onesimus, whom *I have begotten* in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending *my very heart*, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.” (Philemon 1:10-14)

So when Paul sent Tychicus to Colossae with his letter to that church, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to send Onesimus back to Philemon. At the end of this verse Paul says that both Tychicus and Onesimus “**will inform you about the whole situation here.**” Both men were designated messengers to the church at Colossae. Paul will now mention some of his other companions in ministry.

Col 4:10 - Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and [also] Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);

Aristarchus was one of Paul's constant companions. We know that he originally came from Thessalonica, so he probably became a believer during Paul's second missionary journey around ten years prior to Paul's letter to the Colossians. Aristarchus traveled with Paul from that point onward. He was one of the believers who was seized by the Ephesian mob during the riot stirred up by the silversmiths (Acts 19:29), and he was one of the men who accompanied Paul from Greece to Jerusalem with the collection for the churches in Judea (Acts 20:4). He also accompanied Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2) where he assisted him and shared in his imprisonment. Aristarchus had a habit of being with Paul during difficult times.

Barnabas' cousin Mark wrote the *Gospel of Mark*. Paul traveled with Barnabus and Mark on their first missionary journey together from Antioch in Syria to Cyprus and southern Asia Minor (Acts 13:5). Even though Paul had a falling out with both Barnabas and Mark at that time (Acts 13:13; 15:36-39), Paul was writing his Colossian letter almost 15 years later, and during the intervening years Mark had more than proven himself in Christian ministry. Paul writes that they had "**received instructions**" about Mark, that "**if he comes**" to them they are to "**welcome him**." Mark truly is an important servant of Christ at this time in Church history.

Col 4:11 - and [also] Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

Paul now mentions **Jesus who is called Justus**. The reason these three men were named together is because they are all Jewish believers. As Paul says, they are fellow workers "**who are from the circumcision**." They all share a common Jewish heritage, and they all have suffered similar persecutions from the Jews as they declared "this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col 1:27).

When Paul says they are "**fellow workers for the kingdom of God**" he is consistent with how he used the term *kingdom* previously in Col 1:13. There he stated that God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the *kingdom* of His beloved Son." Just as God makes believers legal heirs of a heavenly inheritance which we do not possess now but will ultimately receive in the future (Col 1:12), so He also guarantees the legal status of believers as members of Christ's future kingdom.

Col 4:12 - Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

Paul now names some of his Gentile companions. We already met **Epaphras** who Paul described as a "beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf" (Col 1:7). He remained in Rome with Paul, and while he was there he carried on an important

prayer ministry for all those in the Lycus Valley. Paul said Epaphras was “always **laboring earnestly** (*agōnizomai*) for them in his prayers.” This is the same word that Paul had used in Col 1:29 to describe his own efforts in ministry, and Epaphras’ prayer corresponds to Paul’s desire and prayers.

Epaphras’ Prayer (Col 4:12)	Paul’s Desire and Prayer
stand (<i>histēmi</i>) = established perfect (<i>teleios</i>) = complete, mature	Col 1:23 - “ firmly established in the faith” Col 1:28 - “present every man complete in Christ”
fully assured (<i>plērophoreō</i>) = “filled to overflowing; to be fully convinced or persuaded.”	Col 2:2 - “the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding” Col 2:10 - “in Him you have been made complete ”
in all God’s will (<i>thelēma</i>) = “God’s wishes as contained in His Word.”	Col 1:9 - “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”

Col 4:13 - For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Paul gives first-hand testimony to the passion of Epaphras for all the believers in the Lycus Valley. **Concern** is the Greek word *ponos* which can be translated as “anguish or intense desire.” Since Epaphras was the founder of these churches, he took on a great burden to pray for them and to work tirelessly for their spiritual growth. Both of the major cities in the Lycus Valley are mentioned, so Epaphras’ original message had spread throughout the area.

Col 4:14 - Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and [also] Demas.

Luke is the writer of the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Book of Acts*. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey a decade previously (Acts 16:10), and Luke became a beloved companion throughout the rest of Paul’s life (2 Tim 4:11). Here Paul mentions that Luke was a physician, and he probably tended to Paul’s medical needs as well as assisting in the ministry.

Demas is mentioned here only by name, but Philemon 1:24 includes him among Paul’s fellow laborers. All we know about him is that he eventually deserted Paul and returned to Thessalonica, having loved worldly things more than the Lord’s work (2 Tim 4:10).

Col 4:15 - Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

This is the only mention of Nympha, so we have no other information about her or the believers who worshiped together in her home. There were no church buildings for believers like there were synagogues for the Jews. Believers would typically meet in member’s homes. It is possible that fellowships of believers in the Lycus Valley also shared teaching pastors.

Col 4:16 - When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter [that is coming] from Laodicea.

Paul then gave instructions about how his letters should be circulated among the churches. First he says that after the Colossians have publicly read this letter, they are to send it to the neighboring church in Laodicea. Next Paul asks that the Colossians also publicly read and study the letter that is coming from Laodicea. Some have assumed that Paul wrote a special letter to the Laodiceans which has since been lost, but it is more likely that Paul is referring to the letter to the Ephesians. We know that Tychicus carried both of these letters on his journey from Paul in Rome to Ephesus, Laodicea, and Colossae (Eph 6:21). So it is probably best to think of this so-called “missing” letter as a circulating letter delivered first to Ephesus and then to Laodicea before it would eventually reach Colossae.

Col 4:17 - Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Last of all Paul addresses **Archippus** who is mentioned only here and in the letter to Philemon. The way he is included in that letter implies that Archippus was the son of Philemon since he is mentioned in the context of the wife of Philemon (Apphia) and his household. The context here in Col 4:17, coming immediately after the mention of the church in Laodicea, has led some to think that he may have been the minister of that church. Paul valued Archippus as a **fellow soldier** (*sustratiōtēs*) and commanded him to **take heed** or watch diligently to be engaged in the ministry to which he was called. He used the Greek verb *plēroō* in the present tense to say, “keep on filling it full.” Paul encourages him in the work he has taken on for the church.

Col 4:18 - I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

In this final verse, Paul himself takes the pen to sign the letter with his own hand and to share two last thoughts. First he says (literally), “Remember my chains.” This is not a plea for sympathy, but his claim to authority. Finally Paul scrawled, “Grace be with you.” He began this letter desiring grace for them and he ends on the same note, so God’s grace becomes the bookends for all of his thoughts in between.