

Series: *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*
Part 2: *Living out the Sufficiency of Christ (chapters 3-4)*
Lesson: *Gospel Partnership*
Text: **Colossians 4:7-18 (L15)**
Date: **Sunday, May 6, 2012**

Colonial Hills
Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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NEXT WEEK'S LESSON
A Review of Colossians

INTRODUCTION

Paul ends his epistle to the Colossians with a “shout-out” from many of his partners in gospel ministry. MacArthur calls these verses a “verbal group photograph.”¹ In these final twelve verses, ten specific individuals are named, and many other unnamed “brothers and sisters in Laodicea” are greeted (v. 15). Three times Paul will refer to one of his friends as a “fellow”-laborer (vv. 7, 10, 11). Many different personalities are represented here: “in this passage we meet the man with a servant’s heart, the man with a sinful past, the man with a sympathetic heart, the man with a surprising future, the man with a strong commitment, the man with a single passion, the man with a specialized talent, and the man with a sad future.”²

In these final verses of Colossians, Paul teaches us three important lessons from this list of people: first, gospel ministry is a partnership. Our walk with Christ was never intended to be experienced alone. “To Paul, these people were indispensable assets to his ministry. He knew well that he could not do it alone; no one can. God’s leaders have always depended on others to support them in their work.”³ These ten names highlight the corporate, team nature of gospel ministry.

Second, gospel ministry is active. It is not just something that is done to us, but is rather something that we engage in. The gospel is more than just a message; it is a mission—a mission commenced by the Great Missionary Himself (Luke 19:10) and continued by those whom He has commissioned (Matthew 28:19-20). Personal sanctification is just part of that mission; discipleship—active, hands-on, life-touching-life, “presenting people perfect in Christ Jesus” discipleship—is the God-glorifying mission of Christ in the world today that He has entrusted to the church. These ten names demonstrate the aggressive and active nature of gospel ministry.

¹ MacArthur, John. *Colossians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996. P. 189.

² Ibid. For detailed study on each individual gospel partner in these verses, see Ibid., pp. 185-197.

³ Ibid.

Third, gospel ministry is global. What God is doing in the world is always bigger than us. There's always a work of God happening in Rome or in Laodicea or in Macedonia, etc., and we must see that in order to recognize the continuing power of the gospel in this world (cf. Colossians 1:6). It's easy to treat Christianity as internal, and forget that it's also external; to focus on it personally, without considering it corporately; to see its impact locally, and not rejoice in its triumph around the world. These ten names emphasize the global nature of gospel ministry.

To summarize, these verses demonstrate that the mature Christian recognizes that Christianity is teamwork in a mission, and they see the "big picture" of what God is doing around the world. Or, we could say it this way: Christ-wrapped Christians will partner together for the sake of the gospel. Instead of mandating that in these verses, Paul models it for us. And in so doing, he exemplifies three practices of gospel partners.

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL SHARE NEWS (vv. 7-9).

Verses 7-9 are all about sharing news between gospel partners. Paul is burdened that the Colossian believers know how he is doing. Two truths emerge in these verses about the sharing of news.

1. Sharing news should be emphasized.

Paul was sending this letter to the Colossian believers by the hand of Tychicus and Onesimus. He wanted Tychicus to (lit.) "make known to you all the things/[news] concerning me" (v. 7). Indeed, this was his "purpose" in sending Tychicus, (lit.) "in order that you might know the things/[news] concerning us" (v. 8). Finally, Paul notes a third time that these two men will be sure to (lit.) "make known to you all the things/[news] [from] here" (v. 9).

Paul obviously put a high premium on making sure that gospel-centered churches knew what was going on with their partners around the globe. It was important to him that those who knew and supported him do so with the understanding of what was happening with him. Twenty-first century believers are wise to gather news about what is happening with their brothers and sisters around the world.

But why? Why is it important to lift up our eyes and consider the family of God around the world and to learn how they are doing and what God is doing in and through them? Paul answers that question in verse 8.

2. Sharing news is encouraging.

The purpose behind Tychicus' news-bearing was that (lit.) "he might strengthen your hearts." This was Paul's ministry goal for the Colossians according to 2:1-2, and sharing with them news about his ministry in Rome would help accomplish that goal. People are encouraged, even in the midst of personal or local adversity, to hear news of the gospel's corporate and global victory.



Application: How is the sharing of news a means of strengthening the hearts of the saints? *When churches and gospel partners share news with one another, several important goals are accomplished: (1) joy is induced (cf. Acts 20:19-20; Romans 16:19; Ephesians 1:15-16; Colossians 1:3-4); (2) prayers are solicited (cf. Ephesians 1:15-16; Colossians 1:9); (3) boldness is generated (cf. Romans 1:16); and (3) unity is enhanced in the universal body.*

How can we, as a local body, engage in the sharing of news? *(1) Personal testimonies of what God is doing in and through us; (2) corporate testimonies from visiting gospel ministers; (3) e-newsletter lists; etc.*

Transition: As he closes out this epistle, Paul models for us the practice of sharing news among gospel partners. A second aspect of gospel partnership that he demonstrates is the sharing of greetings.

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL SHARE GREETINGS (vv. 10-15).

The Greek word for "greet" or "greeting" is used five times in verses 10-15. While the sharing of news can be somewhat impersonal and factual, the sharing of greetings is very personal and relational. These verses picture the loving relationship that exists between gospel partners. Notice three observations from the text.

1. Gospel ministry can be lonesome (v. 11).

In verse 11, Paul acknowledges that his ministry team was rather small at the time. At other times in his service, Paul would face many hardships alone (II Timothy 4:16).

2. Gospel ministry can be laborious (vv. 12-13).

Paul praises the Colossians' pastor, Epaphras, in verses 12-13, using the language of 1:28-29 to demonstrate his commitment to fulfilling Christ's mission among them. As did Paul, this fellow "slave of Christ" greatly (lit.) "struggled" and "toiled" for their Christlikeness.

These first two points simply remind us of the difficult nature of gospel ministry. While such ministry is ultimately “worth it” and will be successful, reality proves what Christ promised—that it is difficult ministry (cf. Matthew 10). Against this backdrop, the importance of personal, relational greetings are highlighted.

3. *Greetings remind us of the larger team.*

In the labor and loneliness of gospel ministry, a greeting from a far-distant gospel minister is a fresh reminder that we’re not alone (cf. I Kings 19:18). God’s team is bigger than us, and greetings help us lift our eyes of our problem and onto the victory that God’s team pictures. Yes, the Colossian believers may have been seriously battling with heresy in their small town, but Paul’s conclusion to the epistle reminds them that fellow-believers around the world were standing strong and active as proof that God’s power was still working through His universal team.



Application: In this passage, the greetings were both ways—the Colossians were “greeted” by many of Paul’s distant companions, and they were likewise commanded to “welcome” (v. 10) those partners whenever possible. In what ways can a local assembly share greetings in order to demonstrate the universal team that God is using? *(1) Within the local church, extend greetings throughout the week so that people recognize their not alone in their daily hardships; (2) among churches and ministries, show the tenderness and practicality of love that says, “we were thinking of you”; (3) practice the hospitality that graciously and helpfully “welcomes” or “receives” those gospel ministers with whom we cross paths*

Transition: Gospel ministers share news and share greetings—this helps them stay connected and encouraged as they recognize the victorious global ministry of Christ. A final practice among gospel ministers that Paul illustrates for us is sharing exhortation.

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL SHARE EXHORTATION (vv. 16-18).

According to one dictionary, to “exhort” means “to strongly urge someone to do something.” In the context of our passage, this mutual exhortation would be an urging toward following Christ, not just in belief (chapters 1-2), but also in behavior (chapters 3-4). It would be an encouragement toward wrapping up one’s life and ministry with Jesus. This is what partners in the gospel do—they don’t let each other coast or be passive; they compel one another to follow and serve Christ. This exhortation has three fundamental components to it.

1. *This exhortation is Word-based (v. 16).*

Paul writes in verse 16, “After you have read this letter, have it read to the church of Laodicea. In turn, read the letter from Laodicea, as well” (NET). The first “letter” Paul is referring to is what we know today as the biblical book of Colossians; the second “letter from Laodicea” was quite possibly the book of Ephesians.⁴ What we are witnessing here is a local church leader recognizing the absolute foundation of God’s Word for God’s church. Local churches should be given to God’s Word and the sharing of it one to another. The Colossian and Laodicean churches were relatively close geographically and so probably shared many things; however, their most precious commodity to share with one another was the Word of God. Corporately, we must exhort one another as partners in gospel ministry to stay founded upon God’s Word, and that begins quite practically by just reading it to know what it says. This is the sole authority and basis for any exhortation among gospel partners.

2. *This exhortation is personal (v. 17).*

True gospel partners recognize that biblical exhortation goes beyond just the pulpit preaching and public reading of God’s Word. Partners in gospel ministry are willing to individually and personally confront one another. While we don’t know very much about Archippus (cf. Philemon 2), he apparently needed the admonition commanded in verse 17 (lit.) “to fulfill the ministry you received in the Lord.” So, while ministry is global, it must also be personal. We must be willing to “admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, [and] be patient toward all” (I Thessalonians 5:14). Gospel partners are willing to get involved in each others’ lives.

3. *This exhortation is gracious (v. 18).*

Because his eyesight was apparently quite poor (cf. Galatians 6:11), Paul most likely had an amanuensis write his letter for him via dictation. His final greeting, however, was written “in my own hand,” and his final word was unmistakably one of Paul’s favorites—“grace.” Paul understood that without divine enablement behind every verse he had written, there would be no Christ-wrapped Colossian church. Even the partnerships that he had rejoiced in throughout the last several verses were products of

⁴ “There has been much debate over the identity of the Laodicean letter. It has been variously identified as a letter from the Laodiceans to Paul, a letter written by Paul from Laodicea, the apocryphal Epistle to the Laodiceans, and a genuine letter of Paul to the Laodiceans that is now lost. In all likelihood, however, Paul here refers to the book of Ephesians. The oldest manuscripts of Ephesians do not contain the words ‘in Ephesus’ in Ephesians 1:1, indicating that it was a circular letter intended for several churches. Tychicus probably delivered Ephesians to the Laodiceans, so Paul commands the Colossians and Laodiceans to exchange letters” (Ibid., p. 198).

God's grace, and that's why they were so effective. And if our mutual exhortation for the sake of the gospel is to bring about any fruit in those with whom we labor, then God's grace must enable it. Therefore, Paul's final word to his spiritual children was always "grace."



Application: How do verses 16-18 affect our understanding of exhortation for the sake of the gospel? How will these verses change the way we partner together in exhortation? *Open discussion.*

CONCLUSION

Perhaps before studying Colossians, partnering in gospel ministry was a foreign concept to you, because to you gospel ministry was more of something you go to (e.g., a church service) than something you engage in (e.g., missional living and discipleship). Having come to the end of Paul's short letter to the Colossian church, we can no longer think that way. Paul has clearly demonstrated that "this is your life" or, more specifically, "Christ is your life" (3:4). If we have given our belief, heart, and life to Jesus Christ, then we will willingly partner with others who seek to follow Him as Lord, too.⁵ Because that's what Christ-wrapped Christians do—they partner together for the sake of the gospel, so that Christ may be glorified in all things.

⁵ Such partnership will only be discovered where the love and work of Christ is preeminent (cf. vv. 7, 9, 12, 14). If you're not partnering with others, it may be because the love and work of Christ doesn't define you. When it does, you will love people like Christ does and form partnerships with them in order to accomplish His work.