

Complete: The Benefit of Relationships – Colossians 4:7-18

It was wonderful to have the Lattouf's, our missionaries to the Middle East with us last week. In one of our conversations with them we were talking about the differences in cultures in the different places they have lived. They were born and raised in Lebanon, spent 3 years in Los Angeles and now live in Egypt.

They were telling us that the United States, of course, has the most wealth, opportunity, and ease of life while Lebanon still has several basic infrastructure challenges. For example, you won't have electricity any time you want it. There are certain hours of the day when you just can't get online, or use the AC, or vacuum. For Americans this would make the appeal of living in Lebanon far less than living here. But that isn't the case for them. Of course they have family there, but the way they described life in Lebanon goes much deeper than that.

They said there's an experience of community that nearly everyone in the culture has that they have never seen duplicated elsewhere. Relationships are real and deep. People don't rush with one another. Everything is not built on efficiency, material comfort, and maximizing output.

I think sometimes when we read Paul's letters in the NT, it's easy to think of Paul traveling between Roman cities on his own, showing up and preaching as a solitary figure, and sitting under house arrest in Rome by himself. This couldn't be further from the truth. Paul valued people and because of this he loved and invested in relationships. How do we know this?

At the end of most of his letters he lists at least a few names of those he worked closely with in ministry. The book of Romans is the ultimate example of this. Chapter 16 lists 33 names of those Paul either wants greeted or sends greetings from. While not the size of the list in Romans, Colossians contains a lengthy list of associates of Paul that he loved, commended, and served with. We're going to look at this list today.

Now, before we get into it, it's important to set this up by asking, why would God include a passage like this in Holy Scripture? Couldn't we get a bit of a more

thorough explanation of the Trinity? What about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility? Why a list of names like this?

It's a good chance to be reminded of these words from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Scripture is full, final, and authoritative. We have exactly what God wants us to have and when something is included, we can and should learn from it. God is communicating to us through this text today. This is His inspired Word and is meant to shape and form us. So, here's what we will see: **4 Gifts We Received Through Christian Relationships.**

1. Connection to Encourage (vv. 7-9)

It's very likely that Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome. How would he get it to Colossae? You couldn't just post it with the evening mail. No such thing existed. Someone had to carry the letter. The distance between the two cities was about 1300 miles and would have taken weeks to possibly even months to complete. But when you carried a letter like this from Paul, you didn't just show up and drop it off and jet. You stayed, had the letter read, and offered explanation and insight. You would even interpret it for the people and answer questions about it. It was a big deal and required someone that Paul trusted and who could be a help to those receiving the letter.

Verses 7-9 introduce the letter carriers to the church at Colossae. Let's read these verses. Tychicus was the one primarily responsible for delivering the letter, and he also delivered Ephesians to Ephesus. Paul clearly trusted him. Notice the commendations Paul gives in verse 7. But he wasn't traveling alone. Look at verse 9. Onesimus is the subject matter of the little NT book Philemon. Apparently, he was a slave of Philemon and had escaped and ended up in prison with Paul and come to faith in Christ. Listen to Philemon 10. Now he was part of Paul's inner circle of associates and he's possibly going back to Philemon at this point, which is what the little book of Philemon is about.

What does Paul want for Tychicus and Onesimus as they deliver this letter and what does he want for the Colossians? Notice in verse 7 and verse 9 that they are

going to report to the Colossians what is going on with Paul and then notice the dual purpose of the letter in verse 8.

Paul wants a close connection of relationship and community, even at a distance, in order to bring about encouragement. This is always one of his goals in ministry. Listen to 2:1-2. Let me ask you, when you are going to spend time with other believers, is encouragement one of your conscious goals for the relationship? Do you want to build up, help, and strengthen? Or, do you tend to diminish, weaken, and suck the life and energy out of the relationship? Encouraging one another is meant to push toward maturity and progress in the Christian life. This is our second gift.

2. Commitment to Progress (vv. 10-15, 17)

So, Tychicus and Onesimus carry the letter to Colossae and deliver it and now Paul moves to those who are currently with him in Rome and send their greetings to the Colossians. He lists 3 Jews and 3 Gentiles in verses 10-15. Again, notice that Paul is surrounded by fellow servants and all different types with different backgrounds and experiences. But they all have the same goal for each other.

First let's look at the Jewish co-workers in verses 10-11. We don't know a lot about Aristarchus or Jesus called Justus. Aristarchus was with Paul in Ephesus when the city was filled with rioters over Paul's ministry. Jesus was a common Jewish name, but we don't have any details about him. Mark on the other hand, we know quite a bit about. This is the Mark who accompanied Paul and Barnabas early on and actually caused a division between them. Listen to Acts 15:36-41.

Colossians was probably written around 10 years after Acts 15 and so there had apparently been some growth and change. Listen to what Paul says later on about Mark in 2 Timothy 4:11. Even here in Colossians Paul says that Mark has been a comfort to him. Progress has happened in Mark's life and that's what Paul and his co-workers want for the Colossians, and you can see this as Paul mentions the Gentile associates who want to greet the Colossians. Look at verses 12-14.

Epaphras most likely started the church in Colossae. He probably traveled to Ephesus, heard Paul preach, was converted, and then took the gospel back to

Colossae. Listen to 1:6-7. He's also apparently worked in ministry for churches in the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. We know Luke from the Gospel that bears his name and from Acts, but his name is actually only mentioned a couple of times in Paul's letters. In fact, this is the point where we find out he's a doctor and a Gentile. Demas is a bit of a sad story. He's clearly engaged in ministry here and working with Paul, but in just a few years we read this about him in 2 Timothy 4:10.

Paul also passes along his greetings here to the church in Laodicea in verse 15. In all of these greetings and in Paul's instructions to Archippus in verse 17 there's a common goal. Maturity and progress. Take the next step. Move forward. Grow. Mature. Look back to verse 12. This fits exactly with Paul's overall goal for ministry. Remember Colossians 1:28? Paul has put the work in to see this happen. 1:29. And Epaphras is imitating Paul in this. Look at 4:13. And Paul gives a specific example of this in verse 17. Fulfill the ministry God has for you.

This is what community and relationships with other believers are meant to do. Push you forward. Help you to mature and take the next step. Keep going. Don't stop. Grow. It's almost impossible without others around you to continue on, but strength, motivation, encouragement, and help come from others.

Let me ask you two questions about progress this morning. First, what is your next step in your walk of faith? Be specific. What does God have for you next? Is it regular attendance at church because you have been somewhat off and on? Is it commitment to a church? Is it joining a small group in the fall? Is it serving? Is it reading a Christian book for the first time in several years to try and learn more about God? Is it finally getting the help you need with that sin struggle? Second, how can you help another believer take his or her next step? To do this you need to know what their next step is and you need to take the initiative to help him or her. Helping others make progress is where community really begins to develop and flourish. This is when the church acts like the church and when real growth and change happen. And this requires that we place ourselves under the authority of God's Word.

3. Conformity to Scripture (v. 16)

So, Tychicus and Onesimus show up with this letter and then what happens? They gather the church and read it out loud. And then they read it again. And then they talk about it. And then they apply it. Look at verse 16. We don't know exactly what this other letter is that Paul mentions, but we do know that Colossians and other letters from Paul were already considered weighted with Apostolic authority and considered Scripture. How do we know this? Listen to 2 Peter 3:15-16.

They would read these letters multiple times and in multiple congregations and then most likely the process of copying them and passing them around began. This was the beginning of the collection of the canon of Scripture, and this happened in community. We gather and sit under the authority of Scripture as a community. And then we live it out as a community. This is why the Word of God is the centerpiece of our worship and our lives together.

4. Courage in Grace (v. 18)

Finally. Look at verse 18. Why does Paul say that he writes this greeting with his own hand? Well, material to write a letter on, papyrus, wasn't easy to come by and space had to be maximized. So, most letters were dictated to a trained scribe who could write neatly and in small letters. Think of the scribe as a word processor today. Then, the author of the letter would typically sign his or name to authenticate it at the end, much like we do today with printed letters.

Along with his signature Paul writes two things. First, remember my chains. Paul was in prison in Rome because of the gospel and he wants the Colossians to pray for Him, but also to keep in mind the suffering that often comes with the gospel. And because of the difficulty he ends the same way he began this letter. "Grace be with you."

God's grace is everything. It strengthens us, gives us courage to face suffering, keeps unity within the community, and gives us hope. It's the perfect place to end a letter like this focused on Jesus Christ and His completeness. We have all we need in Christ because of the grace of God. And one of the clearest ways we encounter that grace is through the church. So, embrace this gift, enjoy, invest in it, and grow through it. For God's glory and our good. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 7/5/26

- Is there anything you value so much that you would give up material comforts to have it?
- Are there other passages of Scripture that you occasionally wonder why they were included in the Bible?
- What are some of the differences in letter writing and communication between Paul's day and our day?
- What do you know about Onesimus? What's the back story to the biblical book of Philemon?
- Who is one person who regularly encourages you? In what ways does this person excel at encouragement?
- What's one practice you could begin to do that would bring encouragement to others?
- What's the back story of Mark (v. 10) and why is it surprising that Paul is sending greetings from him to the Colossians?
- Who is one person you can help and encourage to take his or her next step with Christ?

- What is your next step of progress in your Christian life?
- What are some specific ways we have learned of God's grace in the letter to the Colossians?