



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 4:7-18

"Paul's Last Word to the Colossians"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This is the last of our studies in the Epistle to the Colossians, and we are turning to the 4th chapter, and reading from verse 7 through the end of chapter 4. So it will be chapter 4 verse 7 through verse 18, and again I am reading from the Authorized Version, and I will be making one or two additions or changes in the text as we go along. The apostle has really finished the doctrinal section of the letter, and the question of the heresy of Gnostic Judaism is largely over.

But as was the case so often in ancient times, communication was not quite as easy as it is today, and so the apostle, as he does in Romans and in some of his other letters, has a personal word or two for individuals whom he knows, and some whom he does not know at the conclusion of his letter. Since there were so many things that the Colossians may have been interested in the apostle will say to them that one of the men, who is going with the letter, will communicate other details to them. That's what he writes about when he says in the 7th verse,

"All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; With Onesimus, a

faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here."

Onesimus, incidentally, is the slave referred to in Paul's letter to Philemon who evidently was his master, and Onesimus had fled from Colossae it seems, had managed to come to Rome, and there had been converted, and so here he is mentioned specifically in the letter to the Colossae church. More details are given in the accompanying letter of which Paul wrote to Philemon. "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas,"

Now, for a long time that word translated, sister's son was thought to mean that, but it seems very evident now that the particular word in the original text at this point it a word that means cousin, and so we should render it that way and probably some of you having a modern version have the term cousin, but I have in my text, sister's son to Barnabas, or rather now. "Cousin to Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)"

Now, we don't have any record of the commandments that the Colossians had received concerning Mark, but it's possible the apostle had communicated to a friend that was going to Colossae, or it's possible he wrote a letter to the church at Hierapolis or Laodicea, and made mention of that. At any rate the Colossians would understand. "And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision." That's an interesting expression because what Paul is saying is that Tychicus and Onesimus, and particularly Aristarchus, Marcus and Jesus called Justus are, and I should mention these three specifically, Aristarchus, Marcus and Jesus called Justus, are said to be of the circumcision, and that would indicate, it would seem that they were Jewish believers. They were what we would call, to use Paul's language to the Galatians, members of the Israel of God, true believers, the remnant according to the election of grace.

It's possible however, that he was distinguishing those who are of the circumcision as being Hebraic Jews, rather than Hellenistic Jews, and New Testament scholars, recently have been debating that point. We will just treat them as being Jewish believers, and leave that other issue aside since it doesn't really bear on the exposition of the text, to any great extent. It might suggest that there were many more Jewish believers, but certain specific ones of this particular category are those of whom Paul is speaking. He says, "These are only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." And obviously he means these of this particular Jewish Christian standing are those who have been fellowworkers, with a view to the kingdom of God. Now, in verse 12 he goes on to write, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Now, I am going to take that word complete as meaning something like convinced, and that's a possible meaning. The other is also possible, but some of the more recent scholars have felt that fully assured or convinced is perhaps a bit closer to the sense, but it's a debatable point. "For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." Again, if you have a more recent version, you probably have instead of Nymphas, Nympha and the church, which is in her house. The reason for this is that that the manuscripts vary at this point. The male name was Nymphas. The female name was Nympha, and so naturally there could be some confusion in the copying of manuscripts, and in addition the pronoun "his" is, in some of the manuscripts, "her," and that's a natural resolute of confusion over the proper names, Nymphas and Nympha.

And in fact, in some of the manuscripts, the word "their house" is found. Now, it's likely, from what we know of the texts, that the female name is to be preferred in this

case, and therefore we translate verse 15, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nympha and the church which is in her house." So the church met in the house of Nympha and Laodicea. You can see from this that in the early days, house churches were the rule. In fact, we do not have any record of a church building devoted to the ministry of the word of God owned by believers until the 3rd century or so of the Christian era. So house churches were the common thing.

Now, the apostle continues, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." We'd like to know what the epistle from Laodicea is because we don't have any record of an epistle to the Laodiceans. Different opinions have been expressed regarding this. Some think the apostle wrote an epistle to the Laodiceans, which has been lost. That's entirely possible. Some feel that that since the letter to the Ephesians, was probably a circular letter, and may have had some covering words from Paul in which he directed the individuals who receive the letter to send it on to certain places, since all of these places were very closely connected with each other, geographically, it's possible that the epistle from Laodicea is really the epistle to the Ephesians as we know it, but again we cannot be certain concerning that.

As you might expect since we have record that Paul wrote an epistle that could be said to be an epistle from Laodicea, that some individuals would seek to supply what we have not had in our hands, and so there are circulated in the early centuries of the Christian era, an epistle said to be the epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Laodicea, and it's a very brief little letter, about one page, and it mainly contains phrases and clauses from other well known Pauline epistles. I used to read it to my students in New Testament introduction, and they would all laugh at the end of it because it was just like taking phrases out of other letters in Paul and putting them all together. It made sense. It fooled a number of people, just like a lot of people are fooled by the things that go in evangelicalism today, and in fact it found its way into German Bibles before the

translation of Luther, but it was proved to be a forgery, and we do not know of any letter to the Laodicea church by the Apostle Paul so we assume it probably was lost.

Now, Paul wrote other letters that are referred to in the New Testament, which we don't have. He wrote four epistles to the Corinthians. They are specifically mentioned in 1 and 2 Corinthians. What we say with reference to this, because someone would immediately say, "Well, you mean we lost an inspired letter?" No, we did not lose an inspired letter. We lost one of Paul's letters.

Now, the apostle didn't always write by inspiration. The fact that he was an apostle did not mean that everything he said, and did was inspired of God, but in inspired letters, which the Holy Spirit intended to be gathered together in the word of God we can assume that we have in the New Testament, but Paul wrote other letters. He probably wrote many letters. The fact that he wrote these letters, and they are rather lengthy letters, some of them, would indicate he was a very diligent writer of letters. One of these days, maybe when you are digging around in the east, you may come across a letter that is reported to be from the Apostle Paul, but so far no one has done that. That may be better than discovering a gold mine, so go to it you archeologists. And then Paul concludes with, "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."

And finally in verse 18 Paul says, "The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen." Let me, since I might say something about this anyway, and this will shorten the message, when Paul says, the salutation by the hand of me, Paul, what he indicates is that at this point in writing the letter, he took his pen from his amanuensis, or a pen and he penned the last verse, having dictated the previous verses, and the reason for that, is that that would lend the support of the apostle himself, to what was written. It would indicate that it was a genuine letter from Paul.

Now, that was a problem, even in Paul's day because in 2 Thessalonians, he talks about that. He says that some have written letters, reported to come from him, which

really didn't come from him, but he writes, at the end of his letters in his own hand so that it would be recognized that what he wrote was not a forgery. People, even then were already on to saying things that were supposed to come from the apostle, which really didn't. Today they are on to all kinds of interpretations that are weird interpretations of Scripture. And if they possibly could, they would like to put Paul's name to their interpretations, but fortunately for us, it's very difficult to do it now.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful and grateful for the Scriptures which have been preserved for us, and Lord, while we know that we have problems here and there in understanding exactly what the Scriptures say, we thank Thee that in the main all of the doctrines of the word of God are fully and plainly set forth in the holy Scriptures, and we know, Lord, that we have no excuse, so far as the doctrines of the word of God are concerned. We thank Thee for the revelation that Thou hast given and preserved down through the years, that we might have a genuine and valid word from Thee. We pray that we may be subject to the word of God and submissive to its teachings.

We ask Thy blessing upon each of one us today. We pray, Lord, for those who are in this auditorium and those who are outside of this auditorium. We ask that Thy hand of blessing may be upon them and upon their family, upon their interests and concerns. We pray especially for those whose names are listed in the Calendar of Concern to which Mr. Weaver referred. We pray, Lord, that the interests and concerns and aspirations may receive from Thee an answer that is in accord with Thy will.

Give healing, if it should please Thee, and give support and strength where those are needed as well. We commend to Thee the saints of God today, wherever they may be, and pray, Lord, that Thy blessing will be upon them. We thank Thee for the day in which we live and the privilege of representing the Lord Jesus Christ in it. We pray that

Thy have of blessing may be upon the whole church, upon this church, upon the ministry of the word of God today, that Christ may be honored and exalted. We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] When we are thinking about the Apostle Paul and those who were laboring with him in the ministry of the word of God, we often forget that in many of our evangelical churches we have men who are certainly to be thought of in the same way that the individuals who were associated with the Apostle Paul were thought of. I was just thinking of that, as we were standing on the platform and Mr. Weaver, who was leading our singing, as you know, has been a minister of the word of God, and still is a minister of the word of God. He was an ordained Methodist minister, and still ministers the word of God, and we are thankful for the contribution that he and his wife Roberta have made to Believers Chapel.

And then some of you may not know that Mark McCracken is also a minister of the word of God and has pastored churches, and we are grateful, very grateful for his contribution and also Dorothy's, who is with him, who has been our Bible teacher, with a very effective ministry particularly to the ladies and to the children through the years, so we have lots of fellow workers, who are beloved by the Lord by the saints of God in Believers Chapel, and we are grateful to these men because we really couldn't carry on the kind of work that we try to carry on without the help of these individuals. So we are thankful to you, Merle, and to you, Mark, and to your wives as well.

The subject for today is Paul's Last Words to Colossae, and here we have what might be called a family photograph. We all have had photographs presented to us in which our, the members of family that preceded us perhaps or of us when we were young, are looked and everybody gathers around and tries to identify the pictures. When I went to Newberry, South Carolina a couple of years ago, I saw again a family photograph taken on the front of a house, a couple of doors or so from the Astley

Presbyterian Church, where my father grew up, and my great grandfather was an elder for a number of years, and I was trying to pick out my father, who was just a little boy, on the family photograph on the front of that particular building.

Well, here we have Paul's family photograph. His fellow workers and his friends, taken while the apostle was awaiting his trial in detention in Rome. Of course there's no picture of them, but it's a picture in words of those who meant so much to the effectiveness of the ministry of the great apostle to the Gentiles. It's remarkable for the evidence that it gives of the family atmosphere that surrounded the apostle in his imprisonment. Notice the use of the terms brother and beloved. A number of these have occurred as we have read through, and I am sure you noticed them as we read through the passage. Love, Christian love, true Christian love in the truth concern, and appreciation are afflicted in the words of the apostle, and we learn a great deal about what sort of person Paul was. We would like to know what kind of person he was.

Well, someone has summed up the picture of Paul as presented here in this way. He had a great capacity for people. He had a great capacity for sharing his ministry and he had a great capacity for supporting those who supported him in the ministry. Notice how he speaks of Tychicus, "a beloved brother, faithful minister, fellowservant in the Lord." Of Onesimus he says, "A faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you." And then in verse 11, he speaks of individuals, Jewish individuals, the three as being, "Fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God which had been a comfort to me." And of Epaphras of whom he has spoken already. He says, "He has a great zeal for you and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis."

And Paul also had one other thing that stands out to me. He had a great capacity for single mindedness in the service of the Lord. Paul never let go. He was an individual who had one goal in life, and that was to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ through his Christian life and service, and he never ceased in seeking to reach that goal. And at the end of his life, you'll remember in 2 Timothy in chapter 4, he speaks about his life, and

he says, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." He truly was a man who would not and did not let go, so different from so many who have professed faith in Christ.

They begin their Christian life with a great deal of excitement it seems. They do a great deal of talking. In fact in the beginning years of their Christian life, they are often very active, but as the years go by they become a little indifferent, a little cold, even perhaps to the things of the word of God, and it seems almost as if their life, if it doesn't reach a plateau and stay there, reaches a plateau and then drifts a bit down through the years in decline. Paul never let go. We can admire him for that, and we can get down upon our knees and ask God to give us the same kind of perseverance in following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, we're going to look just briefly at the remainder of the verses of the 4th chapter, and in verse 7 through verse 9, he says a word about those who are going to take this epistle back to the church in Colossae. I call it Paul's postal messengers, but you can just call them Paul's postmen if you like. That's what they were, Tychicus, and Onesimus. He's finished the substance of the letter. You'll notice that there is very little in the remaining verses that could be said to relate directly to the problem in Colossae, maybe a point or two here or there, but there is no real dealing with that question. Now, he's finished with it. He said what he wanted to say about it.

The importance of the little things in life are seen here, the first of the men of whom he speaks in Tychicus, a name that means fortuitous or fortunate. Mr. Fortunate we will call him, certainly fortunate to be with the Apostle Paul. We know from the book of Acts, and from other places in Paul's epistles, that he was with Paul on three occasions.

The thing about Tychicus is his lowly submissive service that he rendered to the Lord and to the Lord's apostle. He was what I could call an apostolic legit.

You know sometimes we listen to so many preachers who have never, in my opinion, done sufficient study of New Testament ecclesiology and they tend to think of Timothy and Titus and men like that as the ancient equivalence of the pastor of the church today. As we have so often said, and I won't labor the point this morning, there is no such thing in the New Testament as the office of pastor. There is the gift of pastor, teacher, but no such thing as the office of pastor. Offices in the church are the office of elder, the office of deacon, the office of priest. Those are the offices, no more, no less. The pastoral gift is a gift, and therefore it is not to be equated with our modern, say president of a corporation or owner of a corporation. The pastor is simply a person who has a gift, a pastor teacher. He may minister regularly in a pulpit like this, or he may not. He may confine his ministry to the Lord's Supper, where we have freedom to exercise our spiritual gifts.

Now, Timothy and Titus are never said to be pastors. What they were so far as we can tell from the New Testament is that they were helpers of the Apostle Paul. They obeyed Paul. They didn't obey a body of elders, specifically. They were attached, so far as we know to the Apostle Paul.

Now, I don't mean that when they were in the local church they were not subject to the elders of the church, but they were what I would call apostolic lieutenants, or legats, representatives of Paul, and therefore he could tell them to go to a certain place, and tell them to appoint elders, and they could do that. We read that for example in Paul's letter to Titus.

Now, I suggest to you, I don't know that this is true, but I suggest to you, I think I'm right, that Tychicus was of the same classification. He was an apostolic legit, who simply did the things that the apostle, who was the authoritative apostle of the Lord Jesus

Christ desired him to do, and he did it with proper submission to authority. In other words, he served the Lord in the lowly place of a helper of Paul the Apostle.

Now, how many of you would like to do that? Well, looking back now, you'd choose nothing more than that. At least I hope you would. I'd rather be a helper of the Apostle Paul than president of General Motors, but at any rate, when we look back on it now, we can see the significance of this work. Maybe in the future, if we have some more years, you might see the significance of serving the Lord Jesus Christ today rather than a company with which you are associated or even the one with which you have built up and owned. You see the most important things in life ultimately are the things that concern our ultimate life and well being. Tychicus, think of that, his name is in Holy Scripture inscribed by the apostle to the Gentiles as a faithful minister, a beloved brother, faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. Mr. Fortunate, how fortunate he really was.

And then Onesimus, what a story pertains to the life of Onesimus. We don't have time to go into it. One of these days we will expound the epistle to Philemon, but you remember he was a slave of Philemon. He evidentially left him, and left him under circumstances that were not really proper. He fled from his master and in those days, the slave was subject to certain governments and certain regulations, and in some cases it was a capital crime to abandon your master. Onesimus escaped. He went to Rome because one could most easily be lost in the population of the great city of Rome, but God was directing his steps, and here is a man who escaped from his master Philemon. I don't know why he did. Maybe he thought Philemon was too much of a spiritual man. Maybe he was unhappy in the kind of life that he was living, but when he got to Rome, who should he run into but the man who was at the heart of all that was happening, the Apostle Paul, and then he was converted, and then as God's Holy Spirit worked in his heart, it became evident to him that he needed to go back and right a wrong of what had happened in his life.

He told Paul about his story, and Paul said, "You know just like Mr. Fortunate over here, it's fortunate that you have been the of Philemon because I've heard of him from Epaphras, and I believe that we can arrange it so that you can go back and resume your place, if that's what is desirable, without suffering any because I think I know Philemon well enough to know that he will forgive what has transpired because of what I, by the grace of God have mean to him." And you know how he wrote back to Philemon and he said, with reference to Onesimus these remarkable words. Well, they truly are remarkable. He said, "Philemon if you count me a brother or a partner, receive him as my self." In other words, when you look at Onesimus when he comes back, don't look at a runaway slave, who's angered you because of what he's done. Look at him, and say, "I see Paul." So receive him as myself. That's what we call the doctrine of identification or representation. Paul is going to represent Onesimus to Philemon.

This week I was reading a chapter in a book entitled *Churches on the Wrong Road*. It was written by Madeline Longley. Some of you may have read some of the books that she has written. She has a chapter in this, "What May I Expect of My Church," and she's an Anglican or an Episcopalian, living in the United States now, and she talks about things like abortion, genetic engineering and other things that are issues in so many of the churches today, and essentially what she says, is "I don't want my church to take official stands on any of these things because there are many kinds of problems that one must look at individually." What she said is I want my church, through the teaching of the word of God, to so ground me in the word of God that I am able to make wise effective decisions of myself with regard to these social problems. It's a very well written article. She's not what we call a strong evangelical believer, but nevertheless a believer.

And in the course of her article she said, I need my church to teach me this so that I may be able to proclaim in John Donne's word, "I am to be judged by a merciful God who is not willing to see what I have some amiss, and though of myself I have nothing to present to him but sins and misery, yet I know he looks not upon me now as I am of

myself, but as I am in my savior. I am therefore full of joy and shall die in peace." That's what John Donne, a famous Christian and master of English literature said. And then of it there is a Latin quote, and this comes from Mr. Donne too. *Copores hies en don sen don onimi sitti, Jesu*, and that is translated in this text, "This is my body's shroud, the shroud of my soul Jesus." I think that really should be translated in another way because the *sitti* are subjunctive in Latin, and it really means something like this, "May the Lord Jesus be the shroud of my body, and may the Lord Jesus be the shroud of my soul." In other words, may my body and soul be identified with him a protected by him round about me.

To my mind that's more harmonious with what Mr. Donne said. I know he looks not upon me now as I am of myself, but as I am in my savior, and so the apostle, thinking of Onesimus writes to Philemon, "If you count me therefore a partner, receive him as me." Then the second thing he says is, "If he hath wronged thee or oweth thee anything, put that on mine account." In other words, the imputation of sin, and so the sin of Onesimus is to be put on the account of the Apostle Paul.

Now, Paul had a great account with Philemon evidentially because he was the means by which Philemon came to the faith, and he knew he could appeal to him, and he knew that he had a tremendous bank roll so far as Philemon was concerned, and so he said, "Whatever Onesimus has done, put it on my account. Impute what he has done wrong to the positives that lie in my account." That's like the Lord Jesus having our sins imputed to him and bearing them, so that in the illustration, "If he hath wronged thee or oweth thee anything put that on mine account the Lord Jesus Christ says."

And finally, Paul writes in verse 19 of Philemon, "I Paul have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it. Albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self asides." So he says, I'll pay it, but remember Philemon you owe me your own soul, so "Onesimus a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you." Reminder again of the marvelous grace of God, and also of the dedication of the Christian who

believed that having done something wrong, it was necessary for him to make it right. I know it must have cost him a great deal to go to Paul and tell the story.

In the 10th verse, Paul's final greetings are set forth, and their greetings from Paul's associates. There are six of them, and then there are greetings from Paul himself. The six companions are three Jewish, three Gentiles. That gives you a good picture, does it not of the character of the early church. Its character was changing, but in the early days it was primarily a Jewish Christian church, but the Gentiles were pouring in through the ministry of the Apostle Paul and it was fast becoming a majority Gentile church. Paul writes, "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you." Whether that means that he was actually in prison with Paul voluntarily or other wise or whether it is to be taken spiritual, that is he is confined himself to minister to Paul while he is in prison, we are not exactly certain. As a matter of fact, the term used in the original text is one that means a prisoner of war, and so it may well be that Paul is speaking somewhat symbolically or spiritually and he's linking Aristarchus with him in the Christian warfare, Aristarchus.

Then he mentions Mark, and Marcus. That's John Mark, sister's son to Barnabas, or cousin to Barnabas, touching whom you receive commandments if he comes unto you, residence him. That's a marvelous little touch too. This is of course is long after Paul has had his trouble with Mark. Remember they went on their first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas, and John Mark was with them, and the managed to go through Cypress, and they finally landed over in Perga and Pamphilia, and there Mark got cold feet for what was lying before him. Whether he became fearful over the experiences that faced him as he thought about going up into the highlands toward Antioch and Pasidea, or whether he became unhappy with identification as a Jewish believer with a strong Jewish background with the ministry that Paul was carrying on as an apostle to the Gentiles and felt out of touch with things, or whether he just had a feeling of desiring to get back to mama, like some have suggested -- at any rate, he skulked home to the Jerusalem area, and the apostle was very much upset over it.

He felt that he had been a traitor to the work, and later on when the second missionary journey was started, and Paul and Barnabas said, let's go out and visit the churches the we formed, Barnabas said, "Let's take Mark." And Paul said, "No, we're not going to take Mark. He departed from the work previously." And they had such an argument over it that finally they separated, and from what we read in the New Testament, we can, I think assume they separated in a friendly fashion, but disagreed over Mark. The results someone has said, is that there were two missionary societies formed now instead of one, and therefore greater work was done. I can't pass judgment on that.

We know, however that some time passed, and then later on, in this epistle right here, we read that Mark is evidently beginning to come back into the good graces of the Apostle Paul. For he says, "Mark, greets you cousin of Barnabas, you've received commandments concerning him. If he come to you, receive him." And then finally in Paul's last imprisonment, in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 11, we read, "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee for he is profitable to me for ministry." So here is the person that Paul was very unhappy over and felt he had been a traitor to the work. Paul is now in his last imprisonment calling for Mark, saying that he's profitable for ministry. The word that is used here in 2 Timothy chapter 4 is the word used previously in the epistle and translated, I'm sure you remember the translation in the Authorized Version, meat for the master's use, so here is a man who has made his way back into the favor of the Apostle Paul, meat for the master's use, and if we have any doubt about his approval, let us remember that Mark is the one whom God the Holy Spirit designated to write for us the gospel of Mark.

The third of the Jewish brethren is Jesus who is called Justus. We really don't know anything about him. The word Justus is the Latin equivalent of the Hebrew zadock, and it's related to the word for righteousness. These three, Paul says are his fellow workers under the Kingdom of God, which had been a comfort to him. And they are the only ones of that category who have been such.

Now, when he says the Kingdom of God he's referring probably to the Kingdom of God upon the earth because that's the usual meaning of the term in Apostle Paul. There are one or two places where that may not be the sense, and so we cannot be absolutely certain. We do know this. There may have been people who were really evangelical Christians, Jewish Christians who still were not all that happy with the Apostle Paul. Remember when he wrote the epistle to the Philippians. He said there are some who are preaching the gospel, and he was happy over that, but there preaching the gospel out of a spirit of contention, and so the apostle's mind was broad enough to realize that God can use some people whose motives are not all together pure, if they are preaching the word of God. And he was thankful for that.

So I'm thankful for my Arminian brethren. They may be upset at my Calvinistic doctrine, and if they're preaching the gospel, then I say may God bless you, and may you have fruit because if you are preaching the gospel, I feel that heaven is happy over that. I just wish they understood grace a little better, and when we get to heaven I know they will understand grace a little better, but at the present time, I'm responsible to pray for those who are preaching the word of God even if they do it in a way that I wouldn't approve of.

As a matter of fact, don't go out and tell any of my Armenian brethren this of course, but I don't believe that I'm doing everything exactly as the Lord would have me do it. I don't know specifically, but I know human beings enough to know that I'm not, and that I do have many failures, and have made many failures and probably will made some in the future. I hope less than I have made in the past. But at any rate, here were men who are the only helpers that Paul had from the Jewish Christian community, but he was glad for them.

Now, then we turn to the Gentiles. And Epaphras is mentioned first.

"Epaphras, who is one of you a servant of Christ saluteth you always laboring fervently for you in prayers that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you in them that are in Laodicea and them in Heirapolis."

No lukewarm believer here in Epaphras. Here is a man who like Jacob struggled with the Lord God over the Christian truth that he was seeking to proclaim. In fact, he's a person according to Scripture who agonized over the effective ministry of the word of God, and prayed in that way. That's really what we need today, more agonizing rather than organizing. I am not against organizing, but we need more agonizing, which it seems to me the Christian church is missing.

Now, when Paul says that Epaphras prays that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, if this term complete is to be taken here as convinced as I think that perhaps it should be taken, then of course there may be an illusion to the problems in Colossae because in effect he may be saying that you may stand convinced in all of the will of God, and not be lead astray by the false teaching of the Gnostic Judaizers. That may be one of the few references to the Colossian problem here in these last few verses. And then he mentions Luke, Luke the beloved physicians.

Now, the apostle was a person who had the gift of healing. That's evident from the book of Acts. But now the gift of healing does not mean of course that you can heal anytime you please. It is a gift that is to be under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It's no longer given incidentally. What people do today is claim to have the gift. But individuals who have the gift of healing always healed successfully. Paul had it, but nevertheless he had Luke the physician by his side, and it seems to me more than just likely that the apostle received the ministrations of Luke the physicians quite often because he had physical problems, so the gift of healing is compatible with the ministry of a doctor. You can use Luke and the gift of healing, so far as the Apostle Paul is concerned.

Now, we have to depend upon our physicians and the Lord God. We, when we say the gift of healing does not exist, we don't say healing does not exist. We say the gift of healing does not exist. God heals, and does heal in answer to prayer. He doesn't always heal because it's not always in our best interests that the Lord heal. But when he desires to heal, he heals, and we can see remarkable cases in the experiences of believers today, many whose doctors cannot explain, how they get well. I have a good doctor friend. He's in this organization. He's one of the elders. He said, "You know, as a matter of fact, we doctors have to realize, we don't really heal people." He said, "Frankly, in the case of many doctors, if you don't do anything, the natural response of the human body to problems is to get well. God has placed that within the human body. So we have to be careful. In our leaning upon our doctors because we have a marvelous instrument of the human body, which God has given us.

Now, when you get to my stage in life, then of course you become friendlier with the doctors. But nevertheless when you are young and healthy like all of you people are out in the audience, well, God has given you marvelously physical capacity to get well, even without the ministry of your doctors. Sometimes you can get well in spite of your doctor.

Now, isn't it interesting here that in this little detention center, where the Apostle Paul was, there is Luke the beloved physician, and there is Mark. Sometimes we hear people talk about the differences of a viewpoint, expressed in the New Testament by the authors of the New Testament and there are differences of viewpoint. We studied things like that when we study Biblical theology, that technical particular aspect of Scriptural learning.

Now, in this case, we have Luke, who writes two of the longest book of the New Testament. I've forgotten off hand. I think Acts is slightly longer than the gospel. They are the two longest books in the New Testament. And then we have Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark, and we have the Apostle Paul, who wrote about thirteen epistles.

Now, if you put all of those chapters together, you will find that sixty percent of the New Testament was written by these three men, and they were altogether there in Paul's place of detention. That's remarkable. In fact, that so much of the New Testament was the product of these men who knew each other, knew each other well, knew each other's viewpoints. It's not surprising that the New Testament has magnificent unity expressed within it.

Now, he mentions Demas. Doesn't say anything about Demas. Demas had an interesting experience in Christian things. He is called by Paul in Philemon, a fellow worker. And now just simply Demas, and then later on in Paul's last imprisonment in 2 Timothy again, chapter 4, reference is made to Demas. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." One commentator says, "There has to be one fly in the ointment, and Demas is the fly in the ointment."

Well, also it's interesting, and I must smile, when he left Paul of all places, he should go to Thessalonica, because there, there was very active body of believers who welcomed the word of God. He wasn't happy. He wasn't happy in Thessalonica. He's like a man with a headache. He doesn't like his headache, but he doesn't want to lose his head in order to get over his headache, so he went to Thessalonica and he was a very unhappy Christian. All Christians, true Christians out of the will of God are very unhappy. Deep down within they're miserable. And Demas, having loved this present world, departed from the Apostle Paul.

How would you like to have your name written in holy Scripture in that way? Or how would you like to have your name written in the annals of lives of the saints kept in heaven in that way? That's a serious thing. You know Bunyan, magnificent allegorist, Bunyan has Christian and Hopeful on the way to the heavenly city, and he has an individual who meets them along the way and tells them that he's found a silver mine. I've forgotten the details of it. Something like, he's found a silver mine, and he's trying to

attract them away from their path toward the Lord God to go off to the silver mine, and get rich. And Bunyan calls him Demas.

Now, whether that was Demas' problem or not, I don't know, but that is a problem. That's a problem that many of us have. The problem of desiring money instead of the spiritual things, which we know, are more important. Demas, he loved this present age, departed from the apostle. In that very same chapter the apostle speaks about the crown of glory, which we shall receive at his appearing, and it's for those who love his appearing, to love this present world as over against to love his appearing. These are two alternatives that Christian believers must constantly face, and ask themselves how they stack up in the light of those two appeals, the appeal of the coming of our Lord, and faithful service to him in the meantime, or the appeal of success in this life. So many Christians have been taken astray by material things.

Now, Paul makes some salutations of his own. Our time is up. I'll have to just read through them. He says in verse 15, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and salute Nympha, and the church which is in his house." House churches we said are common, here is a woman who gave herself to the ministry of the Lord God and let the church meet in her house. Have you ever had the church meet in your house? Well, some of you are smiling, and evidentially you have had the church meet in your house.

Now, that takes some submission to the Lord. Have you ever cleaned up after the church has been there? Now, one time is bad, but suppose you had to do it every week. Suppose you had to have a body of people come in your house, trample all over your house, dirty it up, even without intention of course, but still, and do that day or week after week, after week. This lady is a saint. Not too many like Nympha around. And Aquila and Priscilla, wherever they went they had a church. They had one in Ephras. They had one in Rome. It's almost as if wherever they went, they said, "Let's start a church and meet in our home," so I admire him. "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it." Probably a ministry of

preaching, perhaps an evangelist to Laodicea, in the light of the context, but here is a man who needed encouragement from the Apostle Paul, as a man who had been given ministry and needed a little bit of a challenge.

The picture that you get here is of men and women, who are submissive to the Lord God. I think of Stonewall Jackson. This is what he said, of General Lee. "General Lee's slightest wish is a supreme command to me, and I'll always take pleasure in prompt obedience." That's why he was a great general, because of that attitude. Well, we take our leave of Colossians, reminding you of its theme, the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ and his sufficiency for us. It began with grace. It ends with grace.

I ask you, do you know the grace of God in Jesus Christ? I ask you in the words of the hymn. "Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe, you that are longing to see his face, will you this moment, his grace receive," and reflect also upon the fact that this opportunity may be your last. We say with people who suddenly die, "It seems impossible. I just saw him on Thursday, at the corner of Hillcrest and LBJ." But we must remember as failing, sinning, perishing people that our life here is temporary. May God speak to our hearts. For those of us who are believers, oh God, give us the spirit of these associates of the Apostle Paul who served the Lord looking for his kingdom, loving his appearing in submission to the word of God. And for those who are not believers, we invite you to come to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for sinners, such as we are, and offers eternal life through simple trust in what he had accomplished on Calvary's cross. Come to him. Believe in him. Receive his matchless, infinite, sovereign grace. May God give you the grace to make that decision. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this marvelous epistle that the apostle wrote to the Colossians, and we are so grateful for the fact that we are given such an insight into the truth of God and into the life of the early church. Lord may something

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of the spirit of these early believers, and of the apostle descend upon us as an assembly
of believer in the 20th century, may we too serve with submission looking for his
appearing, for Jesus' sake. Amen.