



LETTERS FOR TODAY: COLOSSIANS 4

Closing the Letter

In the remainder of chapter 4, Paul returns to the process of building his relationship with the Colossians. He closes the letter with elements that are common to all of his letters.

Summary Advice (Col. 4:2-6)

- Pray for open doors to speak (4:2-4).
- Take advantage of opportunities (4:5).
- Answer with gracious words (4:6).

Introduction of the Letter Carriers (Col. 4:7-9)

- Tychicus, his co-worker (4:7-8)
- Onesimus, their brother (4:9)

Greetings (Col. 4:10-17)

- From his Jewish teammates (4:10-11)
- From his Gentile teammates (4:12-14)
- To their sister-church in Laodicea (4:15-17)

Signature and Benediction (Col. 4:18)

It is worth noting that the number of individuals mentioned by name in Colossians is larger than in any of Paul's other letters except Romans. Paul wrote both letters to congregations he had not planted, and the extended greeting sections serve to validate his apostolic credentials and establish his connection to the churches. In both letters, the closing sections provide important insight into the early Christian movement.

Connected Congregations

Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were located in the Lycus Valley, about 100 miles east of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia and about 100 miles west of Galatia, where Paul had planted churches on his first round of missionary travels (Acts 13:13-14:26). Paul's instructions regarding the exchange of letters between Colossae and Laodicea (4:16) reflect

the contacts local congregations had with each other. The mention of Barnabas as Mark's cousin (4:14) suggests that the congregations in the Lycus Valley also had some contacts with those in Galatia, since Barnabas was Paul's partner in that work. Paul's initial contact with Epaphras had most likely come during his extended ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). The picture that emerges is one of congregations that were connected not only locally but also across geographic boundaries.

Diverse Ethnic, National, and Socio-economic Backgrounds

Paul mentions ten individuals by name in Colossians 4:7-17. Ethnically, they reflect Paul's statement in 3:11 that in Christ there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, or slave and free.

- Aristarchus, John Mark, and Jesus Justus were Jews. Tychicus, Onesimus Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, and Archippus were Gentiles.
- Mark was from Palestine; Aristarchus, Luke, and Demas were from Greece; Tychicus, Onesimus, Epaphras, Nympha, and Archippus were from Asia.
- Onesimus was a slave (Phlm 16); Luke was a physician; Nympha was wealthy enough to host a church in her home.

Mobilized Ministers

The ways in which Paul describes these individuals gives some insight into their ministries and the vitality of the early Christian movement.

- Both Tychicus (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21) and Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12) are described as "ministers" (*diakonai*) and "fellow-bondservants" (*sundoloi*), which suggests that they were close associates who preached and taught.
- Aristarchus (Col. 4:11; Phlm. 24), Mark (Col. 4:11), Jesus Justus (Col. 4:11), Luke (Phlm. 24), and Demas (Phlm. 24) are described as "co-workers" (*sunergoi*), which suggests that they were colleagues connected with Paul's missionary team.
- Aristarchus (Col. 4:10) is also described as a "fellow-prisoner" (*sunaixmalotos*), as are Andronicus and Junia (cf. Rom. 16:7), and suggests that he voluntarily shared house arrest with Paul.
- Archippus (Phlm. 2) is also described as a "fellow-soldier" (*sustratiotes*), as is Epaphroditus (cf. Phil. 2:25), which suggests that he was a missionary worker who was known to Paul but was not directly associated with Paul's ministry.

Paul's summary advice (4:2-6) highlights key aspects of a believer's interaction with those outside the church. His introduction of the individuals who carried with letter to Colossae and his extended greetings highlight the reasons we should be grateful for those who labor in service for the church. Paul's point is . . . ***We must be gracious toward outsiders and grateful for insiders.***

GETTING PERSONAL

Take some time to read through Colossians 4:2-18. Then, reflect on how you would answer the following questions.

1. How does grace characterize your dealings with those who are still outside the faith (4:2-6)?
2. What can you do to build connections across congregational and geographical boundaries (4:15-16)?
3. What can you do to help local congregations on earth look more nearly like the church universal in heaven (4:10-11, 14, 17)?
4. How can you express your gratitude to those who labor for you in prayer and the ministry of God's word (4:7-9, 12-13, 18)?