

Text: Colossians 4:10-14

Title: Apostolic Partners, Part 2

Truth: Some fail and bounce back; others fail and show their true colors.

Date/Location: Sunday January 31, 2016 at FBC

(Review) II. List of the Apostolic Partners and Those Who Sent Greetings

A. Paul's Couriers

1. Tychicus
2. Onesimus

B. Paul's Jewish Co-Workers

1. Aristarchus
2. Mark, cousin of Barnabas.
3. Jesus Justus

C. Paul's Gentile Co-Workers

1. Epaphras, the Colossian founding pastor (?).
2. Luke, the doctor.
3. Demas, the one who later abandoned the apostle.

Paul not only gives the names of these men, but he also tells something important about **who** they were. The last six sent greetings to Colossae. All of these remind us that Christian ministry—even for the “great” apostle Paul—was a team effort.

V. Paul's Jewish Co-Workers, v. 10-11

A. Aristarchus. He was one of Paul's close co-workers. We learn from this passage that he is a Jew. Acts 19:29 says that he was from Macedonia (the region of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea).

1. More importantly, he was subjected to serious persecution because of his participation in the missionary team. His life was in some danger.
2. Acts 20:4 zeroes in on Thessalonica as his hometown—so he was a Thessalonian Jew of the dispersion who worked with and suffered with Paul. He was of the same town as Secundus (never mentioned elsewhere in Scripture). He traveled to Rome with Paul (27:2).
3. Paul adds one more thing in Colossians 4:10—Aristarchus is a "fellow prisoner" with Paul. Some others are so designated: Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7), and Epaphras (Philemon 23). These were either incarcerated with Paul, or perhaps "sat with" him during his days when no one else was around, and helped in various ways. It does not seem to be a favorable kind of situation, as if it were metaphorical for being a spiritual captive of Christ. Other commentators disagree. Philemon 24 refers to Aristarchus as a fellow laborer, and Epaphras as a fellow prisoner. This swapping of roles may indicate a voluntary "imprisonment" that Aristarchus underwent, or along with Epaphras, to help the apostle.

B. Mark, cousin of Barnabas. He had abandoned the apostle but was now restored.

1. Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary work in 47 AD or so and took John Mark (Acts 12:25, 13:5). The text does not say why Mark left (13:13). It

was about 3 years later that Paul left on his second journey. He did not want to take Mark with him this time. Barnabas took Mark with him and helped him to become more useful in ministry.

2. Paul saw Mark's leaving from the midst of the missionary endeavor (Acts 12:25) not only as leaving the work, but leaving them personally (Acts 15:37-39). We surmise from this reaction that John Mark did not leave the team for an appropriate reason.
3. It was about 8 years later (58 AD or so) that Paul wrote Colossians, and indicates that Mark was back with him. In the latter half of verse 10, Paul reminds the Colossians to follow the instructions about him that they had received earlier. The full content of those instructions is not known; however we know that they were told to welcome him. He was not a bad guy now, no matter what they had heard of him by reputation before.
4. Another 8–9 years later he told Timothy to bring Mark along because he was helpful in ministry (67 AD, near the time of Paul's death). This man who had backed out of the work initially grew to a place where he was very helpful in ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). We must emphasize that Paul considered Mark useful in ministry—helpful, beneficial. He had been not-so-useful (Acts 12:25, 13:13, 15:37-39). What a change had been wrought in his life, and in their relationship!
5. It appears that John Mark is closely connected to Peter, being called "Mark my son" in 1 Peter 5:13. I understand "son" here in a spiritual sense, not in a biological one.
6. What is interesting is that this Mark was "in on the action" of Christianity from the very beginning. His mother's name was Mary, and they had prayer meeting in their home. It was to their home in Acts 12:12 that Peter came after he had been miraculously released from prison, where the young girl Rhoda heard him at the door but forgot to open the door for him.
7. After all the events we have mentioned here, this Mark wrote an important document we call the Gospel of Mark! It appears that when the events of our Lord's life occurred, he was there observing (Mark 14:51-52), but it was not until years later that he was prepared, with Peter's participation and his connection to Paul, to write the book. His useless period came to an end, and that is how we know he was a legitimate disciple. Unlike Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), of whom we have no record of return, John Mark did come back. He did not "love the world" and run after it.
8. A lesson from Mark's life: you may be in the middle of Christian life, yet sin by making some errors in judgment. Or you may have made some mistakes earlier on in your walk and service for God. But once you make a mistake, **you are not washed up for the rest of your life!** Get back in the game and get at it! Don't give up. God can use broken vessels. In fact, that's the only

kind God uses! We learn the lesson from his life, that even when we mess up badly, God can still use us for His glory!

9. Jeremiah 18:4 (context 1-11) and Isaiah 64:8 are good texts to remind us of this same truth. God can fix broken instruments. But note: when God convicts you of wrong, obey Him. Repent, confess and move ahead in righteousness. Don't keep doing the same sins over and over again!

C. Jesus Justus. We know nothing about this man from Scripture except from this verse. There are two other men in the Bible named Justus (Acts 1:23 and 18:7). This one is a Jew who helped Paul. His name being "immortalized" in this verse reminds me that no service for Christ goes unrewarded; no service is useless or too menial for His commendation.

D. Paul wrote in verse 11 that the preceding three men were his "only fellow workers of the circumcision" for God's kingdom. They were a great blessing to Paul in prison—the only Jewish co-workers he had.

1. The apostle did still see distinctions between people from different ethnic groups—including even *believing* Jews. Such distinctions are a reality. Even in the church, it is not the case that all distinctions are flattened out so that everyone is homogenized. That wouldn't be a very interesting world, for one thing, but far more importantly, it would not match the Biblical account of an ongoing distinction between Israel and the church (see Rom. 11 for instance).
2. Additionally, the body of Christ is a marvelous organism precisely because of its unity in diversity. It can take men who are black, brown, and white together with women and young and old and unite them together with a cohesion and love that is unknown to the world.
3. So that we avoid confusion about the idea of the kingdom of God, let us remember that Paul is talking about his work in calling out a citizenry for the kingdom of God among the Gentiles, and that these will be citizens of the kingdom of heaven when it is inaugurated after Christ's return. He was therefore an advance ambassador for that kingdom, the same way as you are if you are a Christian today.

VI. Paul's Gentile Co-Workers, v. 12-14

A. Epaphras. He was a Christian minister who brought the gospel to the Colossian people (1:3-8). He belonged to the Colossian church, and may have been indigenous to their city. He considered himself as a servant of Christ, as did Paul.

1. Earnestly praying always. Here is an example minister. If you are a pastor and come across this message, my words to you are these: be a praying man. Only God can accomplish the work that you are trying to do for Him—that is, if you are doing HIS work and not your own made-up work.
2. That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. This phrase represents the content of his prayers. This is what he, as a pastor to them,

wanted for them. The best way to say this is as the modern English versions: "mature and fully assured." By contrast, he doesn't want them to remain immature, as baby Christians. He wants them to grow up so as not to be silly, doctrinally uninformed, shallow people. He wants them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will and fully confident about it—to hold a stern conviction about the Lord. This is just what Paul was praying in 1:9. This is one of our central goals for our church plant. Our brother Terry has a responsibility to direct the ministry so that it will accomplish this—not other ancillary things—but this needful thing. Maturity and assurance in the faith are essential. Material things are useful to this mission, but not essential to it. The work of the Spirit is essential.

3. Finally, we need to note that Epaphras modeled what a pastor should do for his people—he is very zealous for his folks, as well as those in surrounding communities like Laodicea and Hierapolis. A small three-letter difference in the text causes the modern English versions to say "is working hard." These ideas are almost synonymous. You cannot have great zeal without hard work, nor the other way around. Both tend to describe a man who is doing a serious work in the pastoral ministry, as opposed to someone who is lazy, and frankly, not called to gospel ministry. If you don't show up, you need to get out. If you don't do much during the week, you need to find another line of work. If you don't pray earnestly, tell the church to find someone else!

B. Luke, the missionary team's personal traveling physician. He only gets mentioned three times in Scripture by name (here, 2 Timothy 4:11, and Philemon 24). However, Luke was well known, so no detail was needed. He wrote the gospel after his name and the book of Acts. He often, but not always, traveled with Paul, as we see in the "we" and "us" of Acts 27:2. Acts 20:5 is another example where in the immediately preceding verses, Luke speaks of Paul as "he" and "them." In verse 5-6 he mentions "us" and "we." Thus we learn that Luke and Paul sometimes split up their travels for some reason.

C. Demas. He was another co-worker of Paul. In Philemon 24, Paul again mentions Demas. The letter to Philemon was delivered at the same time as the letter to the Colossians, and there is no "new" news in it.

1. We learn that some years later, Demas abandoned Paul. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul asked Timothy to come soon to see him, because only Luke was still with Paul, and Demas had deserted him.
2. Paul adds information that Demas left "because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica." This does not sound good at all. Let me cut to the chase. When none other than the apostle Paul diagnoses the problem and concludes that someone's inner motivation is "love of the world," this means that Demas left behind any semblance of profession of faith in Christ. He departed not just from the apostle, but from Christ, by which it became evident that although he professed to know Christ, he did not actually ever possess eternal life. Here are some verses on this concept: 1 John 2:15-17;

John 3:19, 12:25, John 15:19. One cannot love the world and at the same time love God the Father and Jesus. This truth makes the radical nature of Christianity clear. It is a massive departure from the world.

3. I can imagine someone being upset, attributing to me an attitude of harsh judgmentalism against Demas and, by extension, those today who are like him. It would be well for a person in those shoes to consider whether they say that because they are really concerned for the spiritual well-being of the Demas's of this world, or perhaps whether they themselves love the world, and what I have said from the Bible is pricking their conscience.

Conclusion

I want to encourage you to see yourselves and think of yourselves as partners in God's service, like these Jewish and Gentile coworkers of the apostle. You are co-workers in a God-given task, the Great Commission.

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