

Text: Colossians 4:15-18

Title: Closing Words

Truth: Believers: read and pray. Pastors: Do Your Job!

Date/Location: Sunday February 7, 2016 at FBC

Introduction

Don't stop paying attention just because it is the last few lines of the letter. Sometimes the most significant words come at the end!

I. Final Greeting, v. 15

- A. Paul asks the Colossians to pass his greetings on to two groups of believers. First is the church in Laodicea. These greetings are from at least Paul and Timothy, but probably also include the rest of those mentioned in 4:7-14.
- B. The second group of people Paul greets is a person named Nymphas and the church that is in his house. The Greek manuscripts have Numphan, but depending on the placement of the accent, the name could be masculine or feminine. The choice made by a scribe on this issue dictated which pronoun was used later in the verse (his or her). In any case, apparently there was a house church in the region nearby the Colossian church. The end result is that there are multiple churches in the region—in Colossae, in Nymphas' house, in Laodicea, and in Hierapolis. There was a church in the house of Philemon, but that may have been the central Colossian church. It is nice to have Christian brothers anywhere, and there were several groups of them in the Colossian region.

II. Exhortation to Read, v. 16

- A. Paul expected his letter would be read among the people. With literacy what it probably was, this was important for the church to be able to know God's word. I can imagine someone in the church saying, "Read it to us again!!!" I think he would expect us to read his letters as well, and since we are forgetful folks, we need to "read it again!!!"
- B. The letter was also to be read in Laodicea, but perhaps only *after* it was read first by its addressed recipients. The letter was written to the saints and faithful brothers in Colosse (NKJV spelling), but it would be beneficial to the Laodicean Christians as well. When we read Colossians, we are reading someone else's mail! But that's OK, because Paul acknowledges here that it is needed by a wider audience than just the Colossian church.

C. Then the verse says that the Colossians were to read the letter from Laodicea. There is some question here as to the origin of the letter.

1. The letter could have been written especially for the church of Laodicea and Paul wanted it to be shared, like the Colossian letter. If this were the case, the issue arises as to the "canonical status" of the letter. Should it be in the Bible today? Was it inspired? The fact that we do not have it is enough proof that it was not inspired. It was not copied because it was not seen as important or unique enough to rise to Biblical status. It no doubt would be an interesting letter to read, but perhaps largely duplicative of the content of other Biblical material. This is similarly the case for other "lost" letters like the two letters to Corinth that we do not have.
2. The other possibility is what some interpreters suggest, that the Laodicean letter was another name for the Ephesian letter, since the words "in Ephesus" were omitted from that letter in some old manuscripts. This could be the case, if the sequence of events was like this: Paul wrote to Ephesus and Colossae (and Philemon). He sent all three letters in the hands of Tychicus and Onesimus. They had to pass through probably 1500 miles of travel to get to Ephesus. They read the letter there, and copies were made. Then they went inland and came to Laodicea. They read Ephesians there, made copies, and went on to the next city, Colossae (or perhaps Hierapolis and then Colossae). They read Colossians. Then they read "the epistle from Laodicea," meaning the one Paul wrote to Ephesus that came by way of Laodicea. This avoids the canonical status problem mentioned above.

III. Ministerial Admonition, v. 17

- A. The first thing I noticed was that the verb "say" is a command in the plural, to the whole church! The same is true of the main verbs in all the verses of this section: *greet* (v. 15), *see that it is read also* (v. 16), and *remember* (v. 18). What we have here is a *public* admonition, and in fact it is an exhortation to the church to admonish their minister (or one of their ministers) to carry on his ministry.
- B. Archippus is the recipient of this public admonition. Who is he? I believe he is the pastor of the Colossian church. Philemon 2 identifies him as a recipient of that letter as well, and he is perhaps the son of Philemon and his wife Apphia. Paul identifies him as a fellow soldier, likely a vocational minister of the gospel. He was a recognized leader in the church, whether full-time or part-time in his ministry doesn't really matter.

C. The admonition itself is, "Take heed to the ministry that you have received in the Lord, to fulfill it."

1. Do not be distracted or neglectful of the duty to minister that you have. It is easy to miss the mark by either being lazy or being too busy with many things and thus getting your eyes off of the main point of ministry. Pay attention to what you are doing!
2. This ministry was an assignment received by God, either directly via apostolic revelation, or mediated through Scripture like pastors receive their ministry today. Either way, the gospel ministry is a calling from God with its own "job description" which I prefer to call a "ministry description." The ministry is a "diakonan" – from which we get the word deacon.
3. Archippus had to complete the ministry. I don't believe this was a one-time project, but rather the entirety of Christian ministry. As I see it, if you are truly called into this ministry, then it will be your occupation and preoccupation until you reach a point at which health does not allow you to continue. Even then, the ministry may change but not totally go away.
4. We could spend a lot of time here looking at related passages. I'll mention two things. One quickly is 2 Timothy 4:5 which commands Timothy to be self-controlled, to endure afflictions, to do the work of an evangelist, and to fulfill his ministry. The second is some more detail on ministry description of the pastor. This is for our Howell work and for myself, and for any other pastors listening in. Much more could be said, and it will be in due course!

D. The reason for the admonition is not 100% clear. It could be that Archippus needs a poke to move ahead in ministry because he is lazy. But, we don't need to assume the worst. It may also be that he is discouraged in ministry because of some problems that he has experienced, and needs encouragement to keep going and not give up.

IV. Closing, v. 18

A. Paul writes a few words at the end of the letter and signs with his name. He did this, as he explains in 2 Thess. 3:17, as a way to authenticate that the letter is not a fraud. This was his personal practice. Perhaps recipients could see the handwriting themselves and know whether it was from Paul or not. It was sufficient at the time to ensure that the readers would know the letter was not from a malicious author, like

other letters they might receive that claimed to be from Paul but contained false and damaging doctrine (2 Thess. 2:2).

B. Then Paul writes a final appeal for prayer.

1. For himself, he asks the Christians to remember his chains. "Don't forget me—pray for me because I'm in jail for the gospel!" To *remember* means to keep in mind, retain in memory. But it means more than keeping the fact of his imprisonment in mind; it means to remember it before God, and also to do something to help Paul if possible. That may include helping with a practical need like food or clothing, or legally, and certainly with prayer that the ministry of the gospel may go forward. That was Paul's mission in life, given by God, and one he embraced thoroughly. **Application:** I found a couple examples of Christians in recent days who have been jailed for their faith, so this prayer request has contemporary relevance. Let's also "remember" our missionaries!
2. For the readers, he wishes God's grace to be with them. Nothing better can be with us than God's grace. The hope is that it will continue to be present and abound. We know from the testimony of Scripture that without God's grace, nothing goes well.

Conclusion

Thus ends our study of Colossians for now! Do not be wowed by anything other than Christ, and let His gospel transform you from a worldly person to a person full of the fruit of the Spirit.

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MAP

Rome, 1250 miles west-northwest, straight line distance



Map courtesy <http://www.chronologicalbibleblog.com/>