

Text: Colossians 4:7-9

Title: Apostolic Partners, Again

Truth: The Bible gives us many examples to follow.

Date/Location: Sunday January 24, 2016 at FBC

Introduction

About 15 years ago Pastor Saxe preached on this section of Scripture and titled it "Apostolic Partners." That title captured my attention and for some reason I never forgot it. As I think on it now, the title interested my mind because it spoke of a team effort, of fellowship in the work of the gospel, of partnership, of a precious inter-personal relationship that was shared between Paul and his co-workers, and of people instead of just doctrines or ideas. Such special team partnerships are part of our own experience in this church and in our sister churches.

I. Why Preach and Study This Text?

- A. It is reason enough that the passage is in the **Bible**. It was inspired by God, without error, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness to equip the people of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- B. But in addition, it is **encouraging** to see how Paul's team worked, what kinds of people were on it, and how Paul loved these people.
- C. It is also **informative**. To the historian and the interested Christian, it shows a little insight into Paul's life and circumstances. Although we would like to have a recording of what Tychicus told the church, we do at least have some insight from these verses.
- D. A final reason why we must examine this text is that it gives us some personal **examples** of Christians and how they served the gospel cause of Christ. The Scriptures explicitly teach that we must note good **examples** and follow them. Consider the following texts in this connection:
 1. Paul urges believers to follow him as he follows Christ, 1 Cor. 11:1.
 2. Christian people are to imitate God, Eph. 5:1. This exhortation follows exhortations regarding pure speech, eliminating anger, and being forgiving, and is followed by an exhortation to walk in love.
 3. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to imitate him, since he was their spiritual father, having led them to Christ, 1 Cor. 4:16-17.
 4. The Philippian believers were to imitate Paul's example, and similar examples they saw around them, Philippians 3:17. This included the

mindset that Paul had about not trying to obtain his own righteousness (3:9), and avoiding the enemies of the cross (3:18).

5. What the Philippians learned and received from Paul, and heard him teach, and saw him do, they were to follow, Philippians 4:9.
6. Timothy was to be a model believer and a model to the believers in his speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, 1 Tim. 4:12. Titus was to do the same, 2:7.
7. The Hebrew Christians were told to imitate the faith of their leaders, in this case perhaps former leaders who had were gone by now (13:7).
8. The pastor is supposed to be an example to the flock of God as to how to live. He is to lead by example, not lordship, 1 Peter 5:3.
9. In Acts 20:18-35, Paul reviews his ministry with the elders from Ephesus, reminding them how he served Christ in their midst.
10. Finally, an entire chapter of the Bible is devoted to giving us examples of faithful people who followed God through all kinds of adverse situations – Hebrews 11.

Hopefully the application to you is clear: find some good Christians, and follow their example.

II. List of 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.

We will notice that Paul not only gives the names of these men, but he also tells **what** they were doing, and emphasizes **who** they were.

III. Greetings

- A. Those on lists B and C sent greetings to the church in Colossae. Those on list A didn't have to—because they were going to be there!
- B. Sending greetings is an important part of Christian fellowship. When I cannot see someone, I may ask a messenger to give my greetings to that person. It means that I care for that person, that I think about and pray

for that person, that the person is meaningful to me, and that I trust the messenger to convey the greetings. If you do not think much about another person, then you probably won't send them greetings!

- C. When I speak in another church, I bring greetings from Fellowship Bible Church to that church family and wish the Lord's blessing upon them.
- D. There will come a day soon, in the will of God, when we will not be seeing some of our own co-workers as often as we would like. After our meeting last Tuesday, we can announce our plan that the Howell church planting team will be launching out of Ann Arbor full time in Howell starting at Easter, Lord willing! This is a bitter-sweet transition. But we can still send greetings to one another, in addition to correspondence and meetings.

IV. Paul's Couriers, v. 7-9

A. Tychicus

1. What was he doing? We understand that he **carried** the letters to Colossae, Ephesians (6:21) and Philemon, since they were fairly close geographically. Additionally, he was going to **report to the church** all the news about Paul. It is as interesting to think about what the news was as it is to think about why Paul did not include it in the letter. I believe it was not important to the purpose of his writing, and could be very adequately covered by Tychicus.
2. Why was he doing it? Verse 8 gives the purpose. He was not only to **convey information** from Paul to the believers, so they would know what was going on with Paul, but also by so doing he was to bring **comfort** to their hearts when they heard the good news. What kind of news was this? I believe it included that Paul was doing OK, that the gospel was advancing even while he was in prison (Phil. 1:12-14, 18), and that he expected to be released soon (Phil. 1:19, 25). By hypothetical contrast, it would be **discouraging** if Paul was being harmed or nearly dead, the gospel was not advancing, and he was soon to be executed!

[There is a textual issue here. KJV and NKJV have "that he may know your circumstances." ESV, NIV, NAS have "that you may know our circumstances." Because of the preponderance of evidence from Col. 4:7 and Eph. 6:21-22, I believe there was a simple scribal error in a couple of letters that reversed the meaning of the clause as it was transmitted through history. It should be as the NAS, NIV and ESV have it. For Tychicus to know about their estate doesn't make a lot of sense in the context.]

3. Who is Tychicus? Paul gives three descriptors in verse 7: He is

- i. A **beloved brother**. Paul loves this guy, and recognizes him as part of the family of God. The Colossian church can thus be assured that he is a good man and worthy of their full attention. Everyone who is in Christ is a brother, and I hope that our love will abound so that we can say of all our brothers and sisters that they are "beloved."
- ii. A **faithful minister**. As one commentator put it, he was a "trustworthy servant." He was not a deacon in the sense of holding an office in a church, but was a servant to Paul and to the ministry of the gospel. He was trustworthy and Paul knew he would get the job done. These two phrases are repeated in Eph. 6:21.
- iii. A **fellow servant** in the Lord. This phrase denotes two relationships. First, Paul felt that Tychicus was a co-worker with him. How encouraging it is to have faithful coworkers! But secondly, it denotes that Paul and Tychicus shared the same master. Having the same master means they are on the same team, working for the same goals. Their master is Christ. Since they are servants or "bond-servants," they can have no other master, for you cannot truly have two masters (Matt. 6:24, Luke 6:13).

4. History of Tychicus

1. He was part of the missionary team listed in Acts 20:4 which was heading to Jerusalem, carrying an offering for the poor among the saints. We learn that he was from Asia.
2. He was sent by Paul to Ephesus to minister there, 2 Timothy 4:12.
3. He was possibly to be sent to Titus in Crete (3:12). He may have been prepared to "substitute pastor" for Titus or Timothy.

B. Onesimus was the other courier of the letter.

1. Who is he? He **is** also a faithful and beloved brother. He **was** a runaway thief who had been a slave of Philemon, as we learn from the letter to Philemon. Here we learn that he is from Colossae, which ties Philemon in with the Colossian church also.
2. What is he doing? He is going to help Tychicus report to the church what is happening to Paul, and he is going back to his master (Philemon 12) to make things right. Part of his report would undoubtedly include the circumstances of his own conversion!

Conclusion

Be like Tychicus and Onesimus!

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