

Colossians Ch4v7-18 - Partners In The Gospel

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone, it's nice to see you today.

Chilly one, isn't it? Yeah, a few nods. Feel free to do ten star jumps while I get myself organised. Always a good way to get warmed up.

So let's turn in our Bibles to Colossians. Colossians chapter 4, we're at the end of our studies. We've gone all the way through and if you've missed any of those talks, then you can follow up online. It would be a good way to catch up.

So we're going to read this morning chapter 4, verses 7 through to 18. Starting at verse 7.

[1 : 42] Chichicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother who is one of you.

They will tell you everything that is happening here. My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

You have received instructions about him. If he comes to you, welcome him. Jesus, who is also called Justice, also sends greetings.

These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings.

[2 : 55] He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vowed for him, that he is working hard for you, and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Our dear friend, Luke, the doctor and Demas send greetings. Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meet in her house.

After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

Tell Archippus, see to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Well, let's pray. Father God, we thank you for this letter that we've been able to study together and read.

[4 : 20] A letter which is no ordinary letter, but your word to us today. And so we ask that by your spirit, you would help us in our understanding of your word, in applying it to our lives, and that you will enable us to live by its truth, so that we become everything, that you call us to be as your people individually, and together as a church.

So help us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's not the most exciting text in the whole Bible, is it?

Just a list of funny names and various greetings. At best, we might look at it all and think, maybe I could find a name here for my new child.

How about Tychicus, dear? Well, no, that sounds like a disease. What about Aristarchus? No, that's far too hard to spell.

Let's just go for Luke. Clearly, there's not much here, so let's move on. But not so quick. All these names that are written here give us an insight into the Christian community.

[5 : 53] You see, when God saves us, he saves us not just personally, but he saves us into a local church family.

And with that connects us to the global church family. So look at all these various greetings that we have here and comments.

Look at verse 7. Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. End of verse 9. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Verse 12. Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends his greetings to you.

Verse 14.

Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas, they send greetings. And give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, the church just up the road, and Nympha, where the church was meeting in her house.

[6 : 56] But it wasn't just these personal greetings one to another. It was something bigger and wider. It was a church-to-church greeting. So look at verse 16.

After this letter, the letter to the Colossians, has been read to you, see that it's also read in the church at the Laodiceans. So 50 kilometers up the road in Laodicea was another church.

And, well, the church in Colossians, well, they would send the letter to them and they in turn would read the letter that was sent to Laodicea. You see, all these greetings back and forth reveal a grand big family of God's people who deeply love one another.

For Christians are not isolated individuals choosing and doing their own thing. And gospel churches don't live in independence either.

We are, if we want a summary for this whole text, look at the middle of verse 11. He says, My fellow workers for the kingdom of God.

[8 : 12] That's a great way for us to view and see each other as we gather this morning. Not as individuals who've come and will just disappear into the week. No, we are fellow workers for the kingdom of God.

So what can we learn together this morning from all these people? Some we know very little about other than their names. Well, using that summary text there, my fellow workers for the kingdom of God.

Let's look at it first as our fellow workers. There's no independent Christian in Christ's church.

We're fellow workers. We are diverse in our background, but we're equal and we are united.

First, look at our diversity. The names may seem strange to us, but they do indicate a great variety of people.

[9 : 19] We have Tychicus, Aristarchus, Jesus, who is called Justice. These were all Jewish names. And then we have Epaphras, Luke and Demas.

Well, they were Greek names, so there was different cultures, there was different religious backgrounds, there were men and women like Mark and Nympha. And then in verse 9, we have this character Onesimus, who we'll discover in just a minute was a runaway slave.

And then in verse 14, we have Luke, who was a doctor, a respected person. So there's a rich diversity of people, isn't there?

Socially, nationally, religiously, economically, from all kinds of different backgrounds. You see, this tells us that the Gospel is for all people.

No matter what background we come from, we are all in need of Christ. We were born separated from God, and we need to be reconciled to God.

[10 : 28] So it doesn't matter whether we see ourselves nationally as Irish or English or Hindu or Muslim. It doesn't matter if people identify themselves as gay or straight or man or woman.

Whatever people's background might be, we, all of us, need to turn in repentance to the one true God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and live our life under his rule and his authority.

So we are a diverse people in our background. But we are also, if we are trusting in Christ, we are also a people who are equal in Christ.

Look at verse 7. Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord.

He is in the Lord. That means he is trusting in Christ. He is in Christ. He's become united to Christ through his faith in Christ.

[11 : 48] But it's not just Tychicus. Look who else is included. Verse 9. He, that's Tychicus, is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you.

Now, not much is said of Onesimus in this letter, but if we go to another letter called Philemon, so if you jump on a couple of pages, we get 1 and 2 Thessalonians, then 1 and 2 Timothy, then Titus, and then we arrive at Philemon.

Philemon. We know a whole lot more about this character, Onesimus, from this letter to a man called Philemon.

Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his master, Philemon. And under Roman law, running away from your master was punishable by death.

But in God's goodness, it seems that Onesimus has met Paul. And he has come to know Paul, but more than that, he's become a Christian.

[13:08] So look at what Paul says about him in verse 10 of Philemon. He's writing to Onesimus' master.

He says, I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. So maybe Onesimus had been up to no good wherever he'd run to, and he had ended up in prison as well, and Paul shared the gospel with him, and he became a Christian.

Verse 12, Paul says, I am sending him, who is my very heart, back to you. Verse 16, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.

He is very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

You see, as far as society was concerned, Onesimus was of low life, worthy of death, and Philemon would have been considered of high regard and worthy of great respect, but Paul says, no.

[14:35] Don't view yourselves as people see you. View yourselves as Christ see you. You're Christians. You are equal.

You are brothers in the Lord. There's no inferiority or superiority in the family of God's church. Let's go back to Colossians.

So as Paul writes to the church in Colossae, he's reminding them that Onesimus isn't to be treated any differently. When he returns, he says, in verse 11 or verse 9, he is a dear brother who is one of you.

Treat him like a brother or sister in Christ. They are equal together. So there's a diversity.

Oh no, sorry. I've got to keep going. Under equality. We see the same as well with Mark. Have a look at verse 10. My fellow prisoner, Aristarchus, sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

[15:54] You've received instructions about him. If he comes to you, welcome him. Now, for a lot of these, we just get names, don't we?

But Mark is kind of singled out and there's a special instruction tied to Mark that when he comes, you are to welcome him. But why has he been singled out?

Well, all the way back in Acts 15, there's no need to turn to it, but in Acts 15, we learn that Mark had literally abandoned Paul on one of his trips.

Paul had taken a young Mark on his first missionary trip, but halfway through, Mark had bunked off. He had run away and abandoned Paul in the work that he was doing and there was a falling out between them.

Obviously, they'd been reconciled together and Paul saw Mark now as a fellow worker and he wants to remind the church that look, we as Christians, we can fail each other, but when we fail each other, it doesn't mean that we write each other off.

[17:04] No, we forgive one another. We support one another. So, we have this instruction that if Mark arrives, and he comes to the church, don't hold him at arm's length and look at him as a failure.

Welcome him as your brother. You see, this is what the gospel does. The gospel levels everyone. It doesn't matter our background. It doesn't matter our failures or what's gone on. It humbles the proud and it lifts up the broken. It makes us equal in Christ.

There's no inferiority and there is no superiority. Have a look at chapter 3 verse 11. Chapter 3 verse 11 as he's talking about the church he says, look, there's no Gentile or Jew.

It doesn't matter your religious background. Circumcised or uncircumcised. Circumcised. Whether you're barbarian or Scythian, it doesn't matter your social class or your culture, slave or free, whatever your economic situation is.

[18:23] None of those things matter. But Christ is all and is in all. So we have an equality that come, or equality, gosh, I'm getting my words all mixed up, aren't we?

We're equal in Christ and that's a better way to put it. We're equal in Christ. There's a diversity and there's an equality. But also there's a unity.

We're united in purpose. Look at how these people are identified in verse 7. Tychicus is known as a fellow servant.

In verse 10 we meet Aristarchus who's described as a fellow prisoner. And Mark and Justice in verse 11 are referred to as fellow workers.

Yeah, they may have different jobs and different backgrounds but they're all united in this common purpose. They are fellow workers.

[19 : 29] They're partners in the gospel. And they're ultimate goal and desire is to see that the gospel would bear fruit and would grow both locally and globally.

They understand that their calling together is to make the gospel known. You see, all these names give us a picture of the Christian community.

And it's how we should see ourselves in the life of this church. church. If you have your term program with you there and your seats, if you happen to have it, have a look there. I think it's on the back of it there.

You'll read this. We are a diverse group of people of many backgrounds, ages, and nationalities, united through our common faith in Jesus Christ.

Church is the people, not the building. And God's people are a family, brothers and sisters united in Christ. As a family we are centred on Christ and serve the community.

[20 : 43] So, you see, we're seeking to be no different to what scripture is saying we ought to be. We are fellow workers, diverse in background, equal in Christ and united in our purpose.

So, first, we are fellow workers. But we're workers for the kingdom. You see, if we're Christians, we have been saved into God's kingdom.

It's a work God has done for us. Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 13. It reminds us of the wonderful intervention of God in our life.

It's not us reaching out to him. He has come to us. Chapter 1, verse 13. For he, that's God, he took the initiative. He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

What a beautiful and wonderful kingdom. Moved from darkness and emptiness into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, a kingdom of love and forgiveness of all our sins.

[22 : 12] Now, as fellow workers, we're called to share this same glorious rescue with others.

That's our fellow workers for the kingdom.

That's what it's all about. But it's tough, isn't it? It's tough to be those who work for the kingdom of God. Gospel outreach is difficult.

Ministry life is hard. Serving is a struggle. And that's why we need the support of one another. We are fellow workers for the kingdom.

So how are we going to support one another? Well, I see three things that we can encourage one another in.

Here's the first one. Have I gone too far? I have. There they are. You have them already on the screen. First, encourage the discouraged.

[23 : 11] Verse eight. Encourage the discouraged. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

Obviously, the church had become discouraged or there were people in the church who were discouraged. So Tychicus, one of Paul's fellow workers, is coming to the church to encourage their hearts.

Because living in the kingdom and serving the kingdom is hard. Sometimes we can feel a little bit like our friend Archippus that we meet in verse 17.

Look at the little comment about Archippus. See to it, Archippus, that you complete the ministry that you have received in the Lord.

Now, I haven't got a clue what happened to Archippus. But whatever it is that he's been facing, it seems like he's wanting to stop.

[24 : 23] I can't go on. I can't keep going. It's too difficult. Archippus has become discouraged. And so there's this little note, this little message.

Tell Archippus, keep going brother. Don't give up Archie. well, Tychicus was coming and he was going to encourage the church personally.

But what was the encouragement that he was going to bring? Well, he was the one who was going to be bringing the very letter Paul had written to the church. And when he arrived at the church, he

would read out the letter just as we've been doing over these last few weeks and explaining to the people anything that wasn't understood.

he would encourage their hearts with the word of God. And that's exactly what we're called to do as fellow workers.

We're to be just like Tychicus, taking the gospel truths from a letter like Colossians and encouraging one another with the same truth.

[25 : 35] So let me encourage us all this morning. Maybe you're discouraged that you're not seeing any growth or gospel fruit.

Maybe you've been reaching out and you don't seem to see anybody come to faith in Christ. Well, look at chapter 1 verse 6. Chapter 1 verse 6.

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the first day you heard it.

You see, we're evidence of the gospel at work. But it doesn't just stop here. It is working throughout the whole world. We prayed about two people in other parts of the world today, Amy and Sheffield, Mickey and Kashmir.

People are coming to faith. So if you're discouraged, be encouraged that the gospel is growing. Maybe you're discouraged and you're thinking that you're missing out on some particular blessing from the Lord.

[26 : 54] Well, look at chapter 2 verse 9. If you're discouraged today and you're thinking, I don't have what other people have. believe. Well, look at chapter 2 verse 9.

For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. So all of God is in Christ.

Now look at verse 10. And in Christ, you have been brought to fullness. So all of God is in Christ, and all of Christ is in you.

So you're not, how could you be missing out on anything if you have all of Christ? Be encouraged. Or maybe you're doubting your salvation today, and you're thinking my life is a mess, I'm always sinning, I'm always getting it wrong, I can't possibly be going on with the Lord.

Well, here's encouragement for you. Chapter 3 verse 3. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[28 : 15] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. If you're doubting today, your life is hidden in Christ.

Christ, you can never be taken from him. You are secure. You will receive your glory. So let's be fellow workers who encourage one another with God's word.

second, another way to help each other is to comfort the struggling. Look at verse 11.

Jesus, who is called justice, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

You see, we got to remember that when Paul is writing this letter, he's in chains, he's in prison. And it seems there's only just a few people who are around about him, who are there to be able to visit him and care for him.

[29 : 29] It wasn't like prisons today where you have everything set up for you. People had to bring things in for you. And he's struggling. In fact, his struggle is great.

Look at verse 18. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hands.

You see, it was common for authors like Paul to have a scribe. Paul would stand there or sit or wherever he would be, and he would dictate his letter, and the scribe would write everything down. But as Paul, as he comes to the ends of his letter, he takes his quill and he takes the parchment or his pen and paper, and he adds the personal handwritten note.

And Paul writes, remember my chains. Please don't forget me. Please remember me.

[30 : 33] You see, here's the vulnerability of a man who is serving the kingdom, and he's struggling. He's in prison. He needs comfort. And thankfully, that's what he's able to say.

Look at the end of verse 11. They have proved a comfort to me. You see, sometimes that's just what we need, isn't it?

The presence of other people who will just comfort us, just to know I'm not on my own.

People who will come and sit and talk, and listen, and perhaps cry with you. Text messages are great. Keep sending text messages.

Little emojis of smiley faces and praying hands, they're all great, they're well-meaning. Keep it up. But what we all desperately need is not just words on a screen, or little emojis, people.

[31 : 39] But we need people. People just like you and I. Someone who will comfort us by their presence. Just to know that they are standing with you for the kingdom.

them. So let's comfort the struggling by being present. And then third, another way that we can be a fellow worker is to strengthen the weak.

Look at verse 12. Epaphras. Well, we learnt about him in chapter 1. He was the guy who first brought the gospel to the Colossians.

And now we learn that Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

You see, he doesn't just bring the word of God and then leave them all to themselves. No, he does much more than that. He continues to pray for his fellow brothers and sisters.

[32 : 54] In fact, it tells us in verse 12, he's wrestling in prayer. You see, we identify with that, don't we? Because praying is hard. We want to pray, but we put it off to another time later in the day and we never actually get round to it.

Or when we do sit down to pray, we just get distracted by all kinds of things. there's always something else to be done when it comes to prayer. That's why he says he's wrestling in prayer. It's a battle, isn't it? It's a fight and we need to persevere and not give up. You see, the church needs people who will pray for them.

And some of them, it seems, were finding it tough and they were drifting from their faith. And they needed people who would step in and pray for them.

And that's what Epaphras does. He prays, verse 12, that they would stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

[34 : 06] The will of God is revealed to us in the word of God. If you want to know what God's will is, read God's word. It's all there. So we are to see God's word as something rock solid, immovable, unshakable.

This is the foundation for our lives. It's what's going to support us and strengthen us. And as we grow in God's word, as we learn together, we become mature and fully assured.

We become stable. So when other false teaching comes along, we're not rocked by it or we're not taken away by it, we remain firm.

And so Epaphras prays for the church. I love Epaphras. I'd love to have more Epaphrases in our lives, wouldn't you?

Somebody who wrestles in prayer for you. And that's what we are to be to each other, to pray for one another in our Christian faith and in our walk, that we would stand firm.

[35 : 17] Stand firm, brothers and sisters. Keep holding on to the word of God and you will become mature and fully assured.

Through our prayers, God works and we are strengthened in the faith. being fellow workers for the kingdom of God is a wonderful privilege for us all.

I haven't got the title there at the end, but it's grace be with you. Look at the very last few words of the letter. Grace be with you.

This is grace, God's enabling power power and strength that he gives to his people that enables us to be his fellow workers for the kingdom.

It's how he opened up the letter in chapter 1 verse 2. Grace and peace to you from God our Father. Grace from beginning and grace to the end.

[36 : 27] And part of God's wonderful grace to us is one another. we're diverse in background, we're equal in Christ, we're united in purpose.

This is who we are as God's people. But that grace flows into our life as God uses us to encourage each other in God's word, to comfort each other by being present and to strengthen each other as we pray.

may God's grace be with you and us all as a church, as as fellow workers we serve the kingdom of God.

Let's pray. Amen. Father, thank you for this wonderful letter that we've been able to read together and study together over these weeks.

We pray that we won't just close our minds and our hearts to this letter now that we've come to the end. But I pray that we together as a church family would keep speaking the truths that we've learned to encourage one another in the faith.

[38 : 00] That we would comfort one another with these words. And that we would pray for one another with these words. Father, may it lead us to being mature and fully assured, filled with joy and glorious hope for what our great Saviour has done for us.

Thank you that we are fellow workers for the kingdom of God. What a great privilege church. And we ask for your grace to help us to be all that you've called us to be.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, we're going to sing together. What is our hope in life and death?

Christ alone, Christ alone. In some ways, this song, I chose this song because it can't be.