

99-03-19a Colossians

Let's take a moment here at the beginning of our study to pause and clear our minds and prepare our hearts. Seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit as we conclude our study tonight of the Book of Colossians. Father, we thank you for this day.

We thank you for the ways that you have blessed us and preserved us. We thank you for the opportunity that we have to gather together and receive the ministry of your Spirit as we look into the truth of your word. We pray that as we see the message of this great letter and conclude our study of it, that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and perception into the overall message and the thrust of this book, that we'll remember it, that it will have its effect on our souls to equip us and to prepare us for every good work.

We pray that we will, as a result, be able to put on the new man and to reflect the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name. Amen.

Turn with me tonight to Colossians chapter 4 where we resume our study in verse 7. The section before us in the letter seems at first to be almost a postscript as far as the doctrinal content of the letter is concerned because we have seen these great chapters talking about the worthy walk, the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ and the tremendous central role that he occupies in God's plan. We have seen the positional truth that applies to us because of Jesus Christ and because of our standing in him. We've seen in the first part of chapter 3 the conclusions that we should draw from that and all of this has been designed to be in apposition to or to counter the arguments made in the culture, the swirling areas of debate and alternative understandings of what it means to live a worthy life, to walk a worthy walk, to be pleasing in God's sight.

This was the issue that gave rise to the writing of this letter and Paul has gone without detailing all of the arguments made by these opposers and false teachers and those who would dilute or pollute the truth of the gospel for believers. He has instead gone back and concentrated on the fundamental things, the important things of Christian life. So then in chapter 3, the conclusions that should be drawn from that have been outlined and the practical application of it has been given to us in these examples that are very close to home.

This is what the result of understanding these things should be in marriage and in families and in the daily interaction we have with those that are closest to us, whether it's master-slave or employer-employee or those with whom we come in daily contact. Then finally, we saw last time that Paul encourages the congregation to continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it, being watchful in it, Gregoreo, with Thanksgiving. And one of the great features of this entire letter has been Paul's focus on Thanksgiving.

We'll return to that observation a little bit later. And he says, Meanwhile, praying also for us that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in

chains. You get the idea here, although this would be a great opportunity toward the close of this letter, to encourage all believers to engage in the ministry of the evangelism and in spreading the gospel and in speaking out and proclaiming forth the name of the Savior.

This would be a wonderful place in the letter to just transition into that. But instead, Paul says, Pray for me that I may be able to do these things. And in the light of our current widespread understanding of the Christian calling, of course, this stands in contrast.

We know that Paul has made most of his statements here to contrast and to point out the truth versus the error that has been swirling around in the Lycus Valley. And it gives us pause for thought, because here again we find Paul's doctrinal teaching in this letter contradicting and standing in contrast to our modern day Christianity in many ways. He says, So that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak.

What does he say that believers should do? He says, Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. This is specifically time that is spent in contact or those times of opportunity that are caused by contact with those who are outside. What is outside? It's outside the circle of faith, outside the circle of the local church.

Many people have said that this is just on believers, but we know from the context of this letter that those who are outside the understanding of the faith, the false teachers who may be believers, but who don't understand the Christian calling, who don't understand the way of life that is characterized and empowered by faith, hope, and love, and those things that God brings into our souls through those. So walk in wisdom. This is sort of a summary of everything that he has said in the letter.

How can we make the most of the time? How can we capitalize on opportunities, which may include sharing the gospel or speaking the truth to a fellow believer in love? How will we know what we should say, when to speak up and when to remain silent? This is a dilemma that faces us a lot, doesn't it? Oftentimes it seems more common when we're communicating or having a conversation with other believers who may have come from a different background or have been taught differently or not taught at all or whatever. We're not so much worried about the fact that their salvation is in doubt. We figure they seem to be believers, but it's difficult to find common ground to communicate because their priorities have been different, their understanding is different, and we're not sure, well, is this an opportunity to speak and to communicate things that we have learned and understood from the Bible, or is it just a time to watch for an opportunity to be helpful or to be a blessing or to stand back and pray for that individual? Maybe we're not the best one to point out that there's a better understanding of a particular issue.

Should we speak or should we remain silent? How do we know what to say to those who are outside, who are not under the common umbrella of understanding and teaching that we're under? Well, Paul gives us the answer in verse 6. We saw this. This is what we concluded last

time. Let your speech, and the word for speech there is logos.

It is used for the spoken word, but it, especially in spiritual terms, has a deeper meaning. This is the term that is used in John 1, 1 and 2 when you have, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, the word was God. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory.

These are all, every time in John there where you see words, logos. Here, I think it signifies more than just speech. There, *laleo* is a verb for speech.

There are many different ways of signifying conversation or the give and take that you have with someone verbally. Here, when he says logos, he says let your logos. Logos is sometimes used for doctrine, the content of your speech, what it is you're communicating.

When you speak, when you contemplate the things that are in your soul, that's logos, that's the word. So, and you'll notice by the italics in your Bible there that if you leave out the italicized word, it says your speech always with grace. Your logos.

And I may be accused of reading more into this than the grammar will justify, but I'm going to tell you that my understanding of what this is saying is, is that this isn't just watch what you say and make sure that it's always graceful and seasoned with salt. Because of the unique construction here and because of the way the verse concludes, I think that this is, I think Paul and the Holy Spirit through Paul is referring more to the content of understanding that we hold and that we are likely to communicate in speech. When we're around other people, a lot of issues surface in our soul.

We observe things, things come up in conversation, we face these dilemmas of what to say and how to say it or whether to say it. Why do we have those problems? Why do we have that dilemma come up at all? It's because of the word of God that's in our soul. It's the logos that's in our soul.

So, if we come to an understanding, should we be forceful? Should we go out and proclaim it? Should we find everybody that doesn't understand it, that doesn't agree with us and engage in an argument? Should we get into the area of apologetics and go out and seek to proclaim it and defend it and establish it and publish it and bring it forth? Go out into the marketplace of ideas and stand on the street corner, get up on a soapbox, hand out a tract, write a book, put something up on the Internet? How proactive should we be in pushing forward the things that we learn and come to understand in the word of God when we're around those who are outside? I think this is what Paul is answering because this is really the issue. Because this is the milieu, this is the environment into which this letter is written. There are people purveying ideas.

There are people saying this is what Christianity really is. You're not really walking the worthy walk unless you're also holding to the law of Moses or unless you're mixing in these other ideas.

Paul says, when you have that logos, when you have the true word in your soul, what should you do with it? He spent several pages here giving us an understanding of the way things ought to be and what the Christian calling and the Christian life is all about, what the worthy walk entails.

What do you do with that when you're around those who are outside? He says, your logos, which of course the emphasis here is on your opportunities to speak, and so it's a wonderful, concise way of conveying all these things. Your logos, the doctrine that you have in your soul that you're considering expressing that is an issue in your mind because of your contact with those who are outside, your logos always with grace. Anytime you're considering the tension or the opportunity that is created by your contact with those who are outside and it's a spiritual issue, the doctrine in your soul, the logos that you have come to understand is on the tip of your tongue, one way to know whether or not it's a time to speak.

What's the climate in your soul? Do you have peace? Are you maintaining your joy? Is this something that you're going to be able to present, to communicate, to bring forth from your soul with grace? This is what Jesus did. Remember we looked at the passage back in Matthew, or I think it was Luke actually, where it was talking about Jesus and the initial reaction that people had in his hometown when he spoke. They said, his speech is full of grace, and yet a few minutes later they were ready to cast him off the cliff.

It wasn't that Jesus went out there and incited them. He wasn't confrontational. He wasn't bullying.

He wasn't talking down to them. He didn't seek to humiliate them. He didn't try to take the Holy Spirit's job of convicting them of their sin or the error of their ways.

He spoke the truth. He got the Isaiah scroll and read from it. He said, this day these scriptures are fulfilled in your ears.

They said, what an amazing speaker he is. What a great communicator of the Word of God he is. But when the content of the Word of God hit their souls, they said, well now wait a minute.

They were almost taken unawares by the graciousness of his speech and by the effectiveness of how he communicated because he understood so well the Word of God. It kind of slipped under their guard at first. They said, wow, this is great.

We've never heard anything like this. But when they started thinking about it, realizing that that word was convicting them and forcing them to a point of decision, then they got angry. Then they got into these ad hominem arguments.

You know how it is. A lot of times you'll encounter this. Even if you speak the truth in love, even if you do everything right, the content of the Word of God will pierce through the dividing assembly of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow.

It treads on our feet. It corrects, rebukes, and instructs. Well, a lot of us are very sensitive when it comes to rebuke or correction.

We're not very receptive when it comes to someone pointing out something that's not quite right or something that needs improvement or some area of failure or oversight or blindness on our part. Our natural fallen nature reaction is to get defensive and to attack. When the message comes from the Word of God, you're going to have a hard time finding a valid argument against what the Word of God says.

So your only recourse is to attack the messenger. If you don't like the message, slay the messenger. Take it out on the person who spoke it.

This is what we call *ad hominem*. It's a well-documented category of argument. When you can't poke a hole in the logic or in the content or the merit of someone's position or their view or what they've stated, well, attack them.

Lump them in with some group that is of ill repute or is not well thought of. Oh, well, this extreme group holds your view, so you must be one of these extremists. That's an *ad hominem* argument.

And so we need to be prepared for that. Jesus said, you know, people are going to attack you because they hate me. And so don't take it as a measure.

A lot of what we've seen in this letter is what is the measure of what you do right and what you do wrong. The reception of what you say is not the measure of whether you should have spoken or should not have spoken. The repercussions or the after effects or the aftershock or whatever, that's not the measure.

The measure is, was it with grace? Was it seasoned with salt? Did you speak the truth in love? Was your heart at peace? Did you do it out of a desire for the Word of God to do its work? Or were you trying to use the Logos as a club to beat someone over the head or put them in their place or pull the rug out from under their feet? If you know that when you spoke, your intentions were guided by the Word of God, you were seeking, you felt like it was your responsibility, your understanding of the Word of God indicated that this is something that needed to be said, perhaps you're in a position where you're duty-bound to say it. Well, don't judge whether you should have or shouldn't have by the results. The criteria is the Word of God.

And this is what Paul gives us in verse 6. Your speech, always with grace. Your Logos. This is specifically the content of the Word of God, the truth of the Word of God.

Sometimes it's going to be spoken and sometimes it's not. But as you consider it in your soul, always with grace. It's with grace.

Grace is the undefinable word. You have to look at God to understand grace. You have to see

the way God acts.

Grace encompasses long-suffering, compassion, love, humility, so many different attributes. The willingness to absorb a wrong without retaliation. Forgiveness.

The entire fear of the Spirit can be summed up when we are dealing with each other and with those who are outside in the word grace. There are so many people who take a position, an extreme example are the anti-abortion people. I think in all sincerity some of them believe that abortion is murder.

They believe that it is anti-biblical, that the Bible is against it, and that it is a terrible crime, that it is the taking of a human life. It is murder. Those who practice it are murderers.

Those who allow it to take place have participated. There are exceptions after the fact or whatever. For the sake of argument, suppose that that is true.

And I'm not taking sides in that debate. I'm saying let's suppose for the sake of argument that they believe in their heart that this is a biblical position, to hate it, to be against it. But then to go forward and to do some of the things that the anti-abortion crowd does as far as the extreme actions, and you know what these are.

People have gone so far as to bomb, to shoot doctors, to lay in front of clinics, to yell and scream, to harass, to do things you could never picture Christ doing. You could never picture Paul and the Apostles. You could never picture Peter, Andrew, James, and John out here making the donkeys of themselves that some of these people do.

That's not, even if that doctrine is correct, even if what they believe were true, that action is not with grace. That's not holding the logos with grace. That's not seasoned with salt.

That's not giving an answer in the biblical way. That is going out and forcing your views, making yourself obnoxious. People will come back, and of course this is the reason the abortion thing is such a terrible debate, and say, well, but what if it was just someone going up and down the street shooting passers-by? Shouldn't you act to stop it? Wouldn't Jesus or the Apostles go out and stop someone who was walking up and down the street just shooting people with a pistol? How is abortion different? I don't want to get into all of that except to say that there are lots of similar arguments.

We think that legalization of drugs is bad. Well, the drug people come back and say, oh, but alcohol is legal, and cigarettes have nicotine and they're legal, and what's the difference? It's just a matter of degree. What's the difference in a marijuana cigarette and a tobacco cigarette? What's the difference in this mild hallucinogen and alcohol? Well, there's a difference in the way it sits in society, in our history of dealing with it and so forth, and there is a difference in someone walking up and down the street with a pistol and someone who's going in and either engaging in

some form or fashion with abortion.

But the point here is when we believe something to be true and we're in contact with those who are outside, what guides our behavior? What guides our decision to act or to refrain from acting? This is a very short and yet very powerful guidance from the word of God. This is divine guidance in those situations. Whatever you do, if you can't say it's with grace, don't do it.

If you can't refrain from acting and do it with grace, then you've got to go back and reexamine the problem. Whether you're holding yourself back or whether you're committing to an action, either way it has to be with grace. If you can't do it with grace, you need to stop right at that point and before you do any more interaction with those who are outside, you need to get back into some interaction with the one who is inside and examine a relationship with God.

Because everything we do, no matter how reactive or how highly charged the atmosphere or how desperate the issues may be on either side, when we're acting on the law of us, when we're acting out of our understanding of the word, it has to be with grace. Jesus Christ never went in and bullied. Even when he was as far on the opposite side of the spectrum as you can be from the Pharisees and the legalizers and so forth, he decried their actions but he never got into ad hominem.

He never got down in the gutter with them and swapped insults. He didn't yell and do a lot of things that you see happening today in the Christian world. He let the authority of the word of God put forward its own power.

And if the doctrine that you speak is sound, you don't have to back it up with emotion and a lot of rhetoric and a lot of charged emotion and so forth. But the word of God reminds me of what they always say. I remember this from when I was a boy in Sunday school about how water and a rock.

You look at water and you look at a rock and you think, well, a rock is always going to be able to withstand the water. But over the course of time, you can see how water will erode away the rocks on a seashore. You look at how water can get down into the cracks of a rock and when it freezes, split these mighty boulders.

And it doesn't at first seem like it's going to do much good, but the word of God is often illustrated or compared to water in the Bible. And that water of the word has its own power and its own authority. And who do we think we are to try to reinforce it or help it along? All we have to do is communicate it.

We can do that with grace. We can season our speech with salt. There have been a lot of questions.

What does it mean to be seasoned with salt? And this, I think, because it's the logos here, it's not

only speech but also behavior. When we're going to act on principle and we say, well, I'm sorry, but I can't go with you to that event, or I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to do this instead, or when we perform our actions, sometimes we have the opportunity to explain and sometimes we don't. But when we're doing it now, sometimes people can be doing the right thing, but they're so arrogant when they do it or they're so haughty or they're so self-righteous that they might as well have done the wrong thing because it's not a good reflection of the grace of God.

It's not the way that it should have been done. And you can do the right thing in the wrong way, and it's just as wrong as if you hadn't even bothered. So seasoned with salt means that it's... Why do we season things with salt? In this case, it's not a preservative.

In this case, it is to make it palatable, to make it more attractive. And we don't want to needlessly create offense. The Word of God will create its own offense.

Christ himself is the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense. We don't need to add to it by being obnoxious in implementing or carrying out our understanding or in speaking forth the Word of Truth. And that's what this is talking about.

We have a responsibility to do what we do heartily as unto the Lord. And as soon as you start thinking unto the Lord, you're not going to be brow-beating and you're not going to be arrogant. You're not going to do it in the wrong way because your eyes are really not on this person.

Your eyes are on the Lord, and you want to be a good and faithful servant. You want to be a good steward of the truth of God. So these are things that guide us.

People a lot of times have questions about divine guidance. I'm not real sure about what to do in this situation. Should I speak? Should I remain silent? I'm afraid if I speak up, it's going to create an awkward situation.

And we say, well, if it's going to create awkwardness, maybe I won't do it. That's not the criteria. This in verse 6 is the criteria.

Your logos, your truth, your Word of God that you implement, always with grace. Always with grace. Seasoned with salt.

And then look at the last part of the verse. So that you may know how you ought to answer. This is why I think it's talking about larger things than speech.

It's kind of a circular argument if you say that the logos is only speech. A lot of the English translations say, let your conversation or your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt. But that's kind of circular because you're going to season your speech with grace and salt so that you will know how to answer.

Well, you've already answered if your speech came out. But because logos is a reference to the

higher and deeper truth of what we say, the truth behind it, the logos as in John 1.1, making sure that our thoughts about those doctrinal issues, about those spiritual opportunities, are always with grace, seasoned with salt. This is our communication all together.

It's like the wife who wins her husband without a word because her behavior is seasoned with salt. Her attitude toward her husband is always with grace as she carries out the truth of the Word of God. Even if she has to depart from it, even if she has to leave because of a situation of abuse or whatever, it's still got to be with grace, seasoned with salt.

Not retribution, not returning evil for evil, not bad-mouthing the husband to the children or the relatives or whatever else it may be. Always with grace, seasoned with salt. It's amazing how this one verse can guide us in so many wide and diverse situations.

We want to redeem the time. We want to make the most of the opportunities when we're in contact with those who are outside, whether they're believers or unbelievers. This is the opportunity to let our light so shine before men that they will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

That's the trick, that when people see the salt and the grace in our lives, they glorify God and not us. Well, that leads us up to where we begin tonight, in verse 7, where Paul is now, and we think, well, that was the real meat of the letter. This is just some sort of administrative details and some greetings and closing comments here.

But notice what Paul says in these next few verses. Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts.

With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you, they will make known to you all the things which are happening here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you with Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him.

And Jesus, who is called Justice. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision. They have proved to be a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a bond-servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.

We, the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Memphis, and the church that is in his house or her house, depending on which English translation you have. There is some confusion in the Greek manuscripts about whether Memphis was a man or a woman. And then we have the closing in verses 16 through 18.

But I want to look at this section, verses 7 through 15. This divides into two sections. Verses 7 through 11 are the first section.

Verses 12 through 15 are the second section. The first section, the people that Paul mentions are Jews. They are of the circumcision.

The second section, the people that he mentions are Gentiles. They are non-Jews. And it's interesting that he segregates them this way.

So the first one in verse 7 is Tychicus. The name Tychicus is interesting because the relation, a lot of the Greek names, people's names, came from the gods. So there was a Greek god that has this name, Tyche, and it's associated with the Roman god Fortuna.

And this is what you might call the god of luck, the god of fortune. So, for example, here Tychicus, and this is really a poor rendering into English, but as near as you can get to it as far as a name would be, his name is Lucky. Some people have that as a nickname or whatever, but Tychicus basically in Greek would be the equivalent of somebody in English named Lucky.

You remember there are some other names in the New Testament that have that same root. You have Syntyche, or Syntyche, was one of the ladies that Paul mentions in Philippians 4.2. And syn means with. A lot of times s-u-n, which means with, in Greek comes over as s-y-n.

So you have synonymous and that kind of thing in English. But syntyche means with luck, or, well, that's as close as you can get, with luck. In Acts 20, verse 9, you have Eutychus.

Does anybody remember who Eutychus was? Paul was giving a late night sermon, and all the candles were burning, and there was a young man sitting up in the third story window. His name was Eutychus. One of the reasons we know his name is it's so ironic because e-u in Greek means good.

So what do you think Eutychus means? Good luck. Well, good luck is the guy that fell out of the window and died when he fell asleep during the sermon. And so, of course, in Acts 20 you have the story of Paul embracing him, and they take him home alive and in good shape.

But anyway, Eutychus here is a companion of Paul. He gets a very glowing description. He is called a beloved brother.

He is called a faithful minister and a fellow servant in the Lord. There aren't very many who get that great description. A man who does get it is Epaphras.

If you remember back in chapter 1, verse 7, Paul says, You learned these truths from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf. So Eutychus is, in Paul's estimation, up on the level with Epaphras. And we know what a wonderful pastor and man minister that Epaphras is.

Eutychus is right up on that level. We know quite a bit about Eutychus. He is mentioned over in Acts as a companion of Paul.

Also in Acts chapter 20, we find that Eutychus accompanied Paul on his return trip after visiting many of the churches on his missionary journey. And in Acts 20, verse 4, it gives a list of some of the ones who were with Paul. Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia.

Also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, Gaius of Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. Tychicus was a companion of Paul quite extensively in the previous chapter. He was one of the ones who was seized with Paul when they, in Ephesus, the mob attacked them.

There was a riot in Ephesus. And it tells us in chapter 19, verse... I've lost the place. But anyway, he was with them there when the mob attacked them in the latter part of chapter 19 and was taken prisoner and shared the imprisonment of Paul on several occasions.

So he is well designated as a fellow prisoner. Actually, he's not called a fellow prisoner. He's called a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord.

But notice what Paul says about him. He will tell you all the news about me. One of the things that we have come to by way of a conclusion and one of the main thrusts in this letter is this.

The measure of our Christian life is not what a lot of people say it is. It isn't what a lot of these competing philosophies and twisted and distorted forms of Christianity say that it is. What is the true measure? It is finding our individual areas of opportunity, our individual areas of responsibility.

All of us have relationships like Paul has described in the last part of chapter 3. We have authority relationships where we are either exercising authority or responding to it. And Paul says that is our common lot in life. All of us have the opportunity to reflect what God is doing in our souls in those areas.

That's the measure. That's how you know how you're doing. Not what works you've engaged in, what missions you've been a part of, what measurable or visible impact anyone can say that you have had.

It's the measure of transformation of soul. And it's going to be reflected in these common everyday areas of relationship and areas of opportunity. As we begin to master those things, we are going to find our function in the body of Christ.

We are going to find those areas of opportunity that are unique to us. Where we have a particular gift or we have a particular adeptness or talent or we just find ourselves being well suited to seize and exploit certain kinds of opportunities. Maybe related to our profession, maybe related to

some talent that we have, maybe related to some bent of our personality or some facet of our character.

And God has put us in a position where these things are going to find expression. And you will notice that in these greetings, each of the people that's mentioned in this last chapter has a unique area of opportunity and a unique area of benefit and function with regard to others. So we see Tychicus here.

He is going to tell the Colossians the news about Paul. He has been a great companion of Paul. He knows Paul's heart.

He's a fellow servant. He's a beloved brother. He's a faithful minister.

He's a kindred spirit with Paul. He's a kindred spirit with Epaphras. He's one of those who are really pursuing and fulfilling the calling of the Christian life.

He's a great faithful believer. Paul is sending him because Paul can't come himself. So here is a kindred spirit.

Here is someone like unto Paul. He can communicate many of the same things that Paul would say if he was there. He's a great representative.

In this sense, he's a great ambassador for Paul, a great executive officer, however you want to look at it. But he is able to represent Paul and communicate the things that are on Paul's heart and mind and what his circumstances are and act on Paul's behalf in this way. You will notice that if you look over at Ephesians 6, that this is a characteristic of Tychicus.

If you look at Ephesians 6, Paul says almost the identical same thing in 6:21. So that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs and that he may comfort your hearts.

This is what he tells the believers over in the Laodicean church and any of the other churches to which Tychicus will take this letter. He may have also dropped it off in Ephesus. But I think this is the same letter.

Tychicus carries what we call Ephesians and Philemon and Colossians all in the same pouch. He stops. He's going to go through Laodicea on his way to Colossae.

He's going to get the chance to drop this letter off and convey some personal greetings. We compare Ephesians 6, 6:21 and 6:22 with Colossians 4, 7 and 8. It's almost identical. He is a fellow servant, a faithful minister, a beloved brother.

He will tell you all the news. Paul says I am sending him to you for this very purpose. So he can

make you know the circumstances and comfort your hearts.

He tells the Colossians he will comfort your hearts. He tells the Ephesians that he will comfort your hearts. So this is a characteristic.

This is something Tychicus is good at. He's great at standing in. Wives do this sometimes for husbands who can't be there for one reason or another.

You have Elizabeth Elliot whose husband Jim was killed down in South America way back in the early 50s. She has had the opportunity to convey and express the things that were on her husband's heart even though he's been dead for nearly 50 years. But by publishing his diaries, by speaking about him and so forth, she has probably amplified his ministry beyond what he could have done himself.

This is what Tychicus is able to do. He is a Jewish Christian and he's rare in that regard because he has successfully escaped the indoctrination and the mindset that has ensnared so many of his countrymen. But that's his particular gift.

That's an area and a thing that he's really good at. He can go out and represent Paul when Paul can't be there. Then in verse 9 you have Onesimus who is a faithful and beloved brother.

Of course we know about Onesimus from the introduction of this book. He was the slave that ran away from Philemon and came to Paul and was evangelized. Now Paul is sending him back along with Tychicus and these letters.

Paul is sending him back to his master Philemon. You can read the short letter to Philemon that is sort of a cover letter to Philemon asking him to receive Onesimus as a favor to Paul and to receive him as a brother. But it's interesting what Paul says about him here to the church at large.

He says, I am sending Tychicus and Onesimus who is a faithful and beloved brother. Can you imagine wouldn't it be great if the apostle Paul stood up in front of a church and said here's my faithful and beloved brother or sister. Fill in your name here.

This is a very high commendation for an apostle to give to a runaway slave. You know the status that slaves had in the ancient world. But in Christ there is neither bond nor free.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, Scythian or barbarian, male or female in the sense of status. It doesn't mean that we lose those distinctions. It doesn't mean that Onesimus is no longer a slave.

Any more than it means that women are no longer women or men are no longer men or Greeks are no longer Greeks. But what it means is that the regard that we have for one another in Christ is not based on social station, on gender, on occupation, on any of the other things that guide the world's evaluation. Not how much we spend on our clothes or how fancy our car or our house or anything else is.

Our regard is based on our faithfulness and on our participation and our growth in the body of Christ. That's the criteria. Paul says Onesimus, maybe he's a runaway slave, maybe he's coming back initially under something of a cloud.

But he is a faithful and beloved brother. And he is one of you, Paul says. He's talking to householders, landowners, businessmen.

He says this runaway slave, he's one of you. He's a faithful and beloved brother. And Paul puts him on an equal footing with the richest and the finest and the noblest and the highly regarded people in the church.

He says Onesimus is one of you. He's a faithful and beloved brother. They, Onesimus and Tychicus, will make known to you all the things here, literally.

Everything that's happening here. We have kind of an example of how that goes, what the nature of that might be. If you look over in Philippians 1, verses 12-14, Paul says to the Philippians, he says I want you to know, brethren, that the things which have happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest that my chains are in Christ.

And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. These are the kinds of things that Tychicus and Onesimus are going to be able to relate to the church about not only how Paul is getting on personally, but the fruit of his labor, the fruit of the word of God and the action of the Holy Spirit in Rome from where Paul is writing this letter. So they're going to be able to glorify God in this.

It isn't just a lot of personal details about Paul and what new aches and pains he's got and how many new scars and things that he has, but the progress of the ministry. It's uplifting to hear how God is moving his plan forward. So Philippians 1, verses 12-14 is kind of an example of the kinds of things Tychicus and Onesimus are going to be able to communicate.

But this is an opportunity. You think, well, what kind of an opportunity does a runaway slave have in the body of Christ? Who is he going to be able to influence? He may not have a husband or a wife or children. All he can do is maybe be a faithful slave like Paul was talking about in chapter 3. But there's a function.

He is also going to be able to tell the tidings of what God is doing through the ministry of the apostle Paul. And he's going to be able to communicate on a horizontal basis. He's on equal terms with the people that he's talking with.

And this is the great freedom that we have in Christ. Then in verse 10 you have Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you with Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. So here's Aristarchus.

We know a little bit about him. Paul says he's a fellow prisoner. And we find out in, this is my Acts 19.29 reference that I was looking for earlier, where Aristarchus was with Paul when he was attacked by the mob in Ephesus and was jailed along with him and so forth.

And he seems to have been, like Luke, a willing companion. He voluntarily shared the imprisonments of Paul and shared the hazards of this ministry. He didn't have to be there, but he chose to stick with Paul.

And because of that he found himself imprisoned along with him. And Aristarchus brings greetings. And he is of the circumcision.

He's one of the ones that has not deserted Paul. He's one of the ones that has come out. Out of all the Jews that have heard the Gospel, there's just these few that are with Paul.

He says in verse 11, along with Jesus and Mark, or Justice, these are fellow workers for the kingdom of God. Aristarchus is a fellow worker. Justice is a fellow worker.

Mark is a fellow worker. They are of the circumcision. They have proved to be a comfort to me.

This is a great and a noble ministry, just to be a comfort to someone who is out there doing the speaking and suffering the imprisonments and maybe is in a more active form of ministry. Just like the parts of a body work together to support each other and to make the function of other body parts possible, there's a great ministry of comfort. There's a great ministry of being a companion and of sharing sufferings with someone who may be in a more active, maybe they're a missionary or a pastor or some other what we would call a vocational Christian worker of some sort.

It is a wonderful opportunity to be a fellow worker, to be a comfort, to be someone who is in the role of support and encouragement and prayer and meeting logistical needs and that sort of thing. But this idea, again, is a part of the message of this letter. This is what flies in the face of a lot of the other measures, the other kinds of Christianity that are put forward.

It's so easy to measure by numbers or measure by impact or measure by visibility or by some other false standard. But Paul has been saying throughout this letter, and here's the evidence. Here's these men that just get a brief mention toward the end of the letter, but in Paul's ministry they've been invaluable.

They're there day after day. They're a comfort. They're a fellow worker.

They're a fellow prisoner. They're a faithful minister. In what way are these individuals fellow ministers? How is Aristarchus a fellow minister? He never wrote a book of Scripture.

We don't have any record that he ever pastored a church. He's just recorded in Scripture, in Acts, and in these letters as a companion of Paul. But Paul says he's a faithful minister because in his

area of opportunity he's probably there just meeting Paul's physical needs, tending to his travel arrangements and his meals and where is he going to sleep and can there be arrangements made for a place to stay or a place to speak or communication with those who are going before and that kind of thing.

And he is in the roster. He's right in there with Epaphras and Timothy and Mark and the ones who were in active forms of ministry. They get the same commendation and the same level of approval and gratitude and commendation from the Apostle Paul.

And we need to straighten our minds out about the value of our daily life before the Lord and the opportunities whether they're visible or invisible to bear the fruit of the Spirit, to pray, to function in these areas we saw in Chapter 3, to be content that the place that God has assigned us. Somebody during the attack has to be in the rear manning the radios and manning the supply lines. Not everybody gets the glory of charging up the hill with a bayonet.

But modern Christianity would have us think that if you haven't fixed your bayonet and charged up the hill there's something wrong with you. But I think everyone that's been in military service understands that sometimes it's the inglorious, invisible places you serve that actually pin down and make these great, glorious, notable things possible. And it is a great exercise in humility to recognize that our, you remember in the hymn, our best, that every work for Jesus will be blessed.

All he asks is that we do our best. Our somethings may be few and these may be small, but what he's calling for is to do our best in whatever it is that we have. And sometimes the good job that you do maintaining a home or being a faithful employee, people that do those things and seem to be invisible in the Christian realm are going to receive greater condemnation from God at the judgment seat than those who are out there with their name on a sign or on a ministry or on the cover of a book or whatever it may be because it's faithfulness in the things which are least.

He that is least, he that is last will be first. Some of those that are first will be last. And we just have to remind ourselves of that.

Don't underestimate your opportunities wherever you are and whatever you're doing. Just lay hold of the lads that is in your soul. Make sure that it's always with grace, that it's seasoned with salt, and you'll know how to respond with every opportunity.

You'll know exactly what to do, when to act, when to refrain, when to speak, when to remain silent. You'll be faithful. You'll be doing things heartily as unto the Lord.

And that is the divine good that heaps up gold and silver and precious stones on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Those are the things that count. We have to remind ourselves.

This is why Paul wrote this letter, to remind Colossian believers, this is the Christian life. It's not

measured in deeds. It's measured in thoughts and intents of the heart.

It's measured in recognizing the opportunities that we have in our mundane, not so visible, not so noticeable lives. When we exploit and capitalize on those opportunities, we're fulfilling the plan of God. And it's just as important.

The runaway slave gets just as great a commendation as the pastor in this section. And that's the thing we want to remember. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we'll look at the Greeks and see what they contribute here in Paul's closing words.