

99-03-19b Colossians

We're back now from our break, and we're looking at this latter portion of Colossians chapter 4, where we have Paul talking to the believers in the church at Colossae about specific individuals. He's conveying their greetings. He conveys to them the greetings of Tychicus, who, as we have seen, is a man gifted in companionship.

He's Paul's traveling companion. He is his emissary. He is his representative.

And he is able not only to represent Paul and to convey his circumstances and the progress of his efforts to preach the gospel and to build up and encourage churches, but he is also gifted in encouraging and strengthening believers' hearts. And Paul sends him to Laodicea for that purpose, sends him to Colossae for that purpose, and we get the idea that there was probably a lot that went on behind the scenes with Tychicus. And he likewise commends Onesimus, who, though he started out as a runaway slave, is commended as a faithful and beloved brother and is one of you, Paul says.

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. We've studied a little bit about Mark.

We saw him in detail when we studied the gospel that bears his name. He is an interesting individual because, like Onesimus, he began early on with something of a deficit as far as commendation or respect goes. You'll recall back in Acts chapter 15 that as a relative of Barnabas, he was to accompany Paul and Barnabas on the missionary journey that is detailed in that chapter.

But in Acts 15.36 it says, After some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing. Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark, but Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. The contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.

Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. So the sort of unhappy episode involving Mark, you would think, well, that's going to be the end of him. But at some subsequent point, apparently he rehabilitated himself.

He learned from his mistake and recovered from that and actually finds himself becoming quite useful to the apostles, not only to Paul. When you look in 2 Timothy 4.11, Mark says, Mark has been very useful to me. This is after the split up episode of Acts 15.

So Mark returns. Mark is accompanying Paul at the time that he's writing these letters to Ephesus, or actually to Eleusis, called Ephesians, and the letter to Colossae and Philemon. And

he is obviously commended at this point.

So Mark's history reminds us that even if we fail, even if we have some sort of a, what we would consider to be a stain in our history somewhere, that's no reason to throw up our hands and quit. You look at Mark and not only does he come back into the good graces of the apostle Paul, but he will become the companion of the apostle Peter. And when you look at 1 Peter 5.13, Peter calls Mark, my son.

Now this is a wonderful recovery for someone who really did not start well, who at least Paul perceived him as sort of giving up and abandoning the effort early on, and he didn't want to take him anymore. But he stuck with the word of God, stuck with the plan of God, and has become once again a very useful individual according to 2 Timothy 4.11, and someone who is near and dear to Peter's heart. And of course he ultimately is the author of an inspired book of scripture, the Gospel of Mark, which is basically the setting down of the verbal ministry of Peter.

So Mark makes a wonderful, indeed a spectacular recovery from what began as kind of a spectacular failure. So he's another great monument to God's grace that is mentioned here in the closing section of Colossians. So we have Tychicus, who is the fairly constant companion of Paul, a Jewish believer, shares his imprisonment, faithful minister, beloved brother.

We have Onesimus, the runaway slave, who through the grace of God and his salvation in Christ is now a faithful and beloved brother. Aristarchus, a fellow prisoner of Paul, who brings greetings, who has been a great comfort to Paul. Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, and he says in verse 10, about whom, about Mark, you have received instructions.

If he comes to you, welcome him. So apparently some other plans have been made regarding a visit by Mark to the church at Colossae. It's not certain that he's going to arrive, but if he does arrive, instructions have already preceded him on his reception and the greeting that is to be accorded to him and the authority that is to be assigned to his message and so forth.

So Mark is a communicator of the word of God. He travels about and visits the churches and teaches and has what you might call a conference ministry and building up ministry in these early days at the church. A lot of the churches didn't have full-time pastors in the first generation or two of the church, and so there would be itinerant pastors.

We've had these even in this country. Circuit visiting preachers in the Methodist and Baptist denominations especially were quite notable in the early part of the last century. And they fulfilled this ministry.

And apparently Paul, having been with Paul and heard his teaching over the course of months and years, Mark is able to go and be received by the churches and minister to them. Then in verse 11 we have Jesus who is called Justus. This is the only mention of him in the New Testament.

And his mention in the eternal pages of Scripture is ascribed to the fact that he is a Jewish believer who has been a comfort to Paul. And he's a companion with him in his imprisonment at this time. We don't know anything else about him except that his nickname or surname is Justice, which means the righteous.

Oftentimes an individual who is Jewish would have a Jewish name. His name Jesus or Joshua, Yeshua, it was a common name in the Hebrew or Aramaic speaking regions there among the Jews. And then his surname, Justice, is a Latin name due to his Roman identity.

And this is the early time at which people started having two names. And this is how we eventually ended up with first name, last name situation. But these are of the circumcision.

They have proved a comfort to me. And then in verse 12 we begin the second section of greetings. And these are the non-Jewish ones who have remained with Paul.

You have, first of all, in verse 12, Epaphras. This, of course, is the man who has come to Paul. He has been the pastor of the church at Colossae.

Evidently a young man and has come to Paul and has created the occasion for the writing of this letter. He says, He is one of you, a bond-servant of Christ. This is a particularly high commendation.

Paul only uses this designation, a *doulos* of Christ, of three people. Himself, Timothy, and here, Epaphras. So this is a very high commendation.

A very high opinion that Paul holds of Epaphras. He says, He greets you always, laboring fervently for you in prayers. And here we see another unique area of opportunity.

It's one that's often overlooked. We say a lot about prayer. We hear a lot about prayer.

But we don't always content ourselves with our opportunities in prayer. This is particularly true when our mobility is restricted because of our responsibilities or our health or whatever it may be. We sometimes think, well, people say, well, you can't go out and do this, that, and the other, but you can always pray.

And we always think, well, that's kind of a second-class mission to just sit back in the rear and pray. But one of my fondest comparisons, one of my favorite comparisons of prayer is that it is spiritual artillery. The artillery pieces are also not on the front line.

They don't get out there and engage in hand-to-hand combat. The artillery is typically positioned back from the front line, the forward edge of the battle area or whatever they're calling it these days. It's typically inside lines and well back and doesn't necessarily risk danger from frontal assault, unless, of course, the front lines are overrun.

But typically they're well back. And yet the artillery is essential to victory in many cases. It's very difficult to achieve a victory without artillery.

Artillery is responsible for more deaths inflicted on the enemy than any other form of warfare, including air, including bombing from the air, missiles from the air, and so forth. Artillery historically produces the greatest number of casualties among the enemy. After all, that is, in fact, what you're trying to do when you fight a war is wipe out as many of the godless communist enemies as you can.

That's what the artillery does. Well, prayer is like spiritual artillery. You may not necessarily be up on the front line there, but you are aware of the circumstances.

This is what Tychicus and Onesimus are going to do is make these believers aware of the circumstances that surround Paul and the nature of his ministry and what his opportunities are. And they are going to be able to pray, as it says in 4, 2, and 3 of Colossians, continue earnestly in prayer, be watchful in it with thanksgiving. Be thankful for the good things that God has done.

Don't constantly be in the request mode. Don't constantly be in the panic mode. The wonderful thing about radio communications, of course my mind often turns to warfare analogies, and the Bible itself uses those quite frequently of our spiritual conflict.

But radios are a great thing. We used to have radios on the battlefield, and now we do. They had to use flags and send runners and messengers, and if the messenger gets shot, the carrier pigeon doesn't make it all the way back, then you're basically blind.

You don't know what's going on. But now we have radios. And there's lots of wonderful radio traffic that can keep you apprised of what's going on on the battlefield, who's moving forward, who's under attack, where the targets are, call for extra ammunition or food or call for the movement of troops.

It's a tremendous, wonderful asset to have on the battlefield. Communications is one-third of the artillery mission. The mission of the field artillery is to shoot, to move, and to communicate.

And radios make that available. In a typical artillery fire direction center, you have nine different radio nets that the fire direction officer is monitoring. That was my job.

It's kind of a trick to listen to nine radios all at the same time, but that's why you have some other people in there that you can delegate some of that to, and they can say, hey, sir, I hear something important over here. But you listen to nine different nets in a typical situation. Well, prayer is a form of communication.

And what do you think would happen if somebody got on all nine of those radio nets and started constantly screaming, medic, medic, I'm wounded, I'm injured, bring bandages, bring medicine,

bring cellophane pads, bring a stretcher, bring the medic, bring splints, bring a helicopter, get a vac. And this is all you hear on the radio the whole time. Well, what about all the other important information that needs to travel on that net? If somebody's got their handset keyed and they're just, I'm bleeding, I'm dying, come help me right away, right now.

Well, we do this sometimes in our prayer life, don't we? We get into a tense situation and we clutter the radio net with nothing but personal requests or intercession for someone that's close to us. And when Paul says, be watchful in it with thanksgiving, thanksgiving is a great balance in our prayer life. Because even though we're under stress, even though we feel the pressure of someone whose health is bad or some other crisis situation, everywhere you see Paul talking about prayer, you will find him talking about thanksgiving.

And thanksgiving balances us and it reminds us, look at the things God has already done. Look at the things God already has in place. Look at the promises and the provision, the principles and the doctrines.

Look at the history of God's dealing with mankind. Look at the heart of God. Look at the attention that God pays to each one of us.

And when we stop and take the opportunity to be thankful and to think about those things that are a cause for thanksgiving, it balances us, it calms us and it reminds us. It's a way of cycling doctrinal truth through our soul. Because when you look at something in order to be thankful, you have to recognize what it is and God's hand in it.

And so one of the most important times to be thankful is when we're under pressure and to balance our intercessional and our personal request type prayers with prayers of thanksgiving. It's an easy thing to understand if you're a parent or if you're someone who has been in a position to give someone something or to provide something for someone. And if you're a provider of a gift or a service or some other thing, and if the person you've provided it to is constantly coming back saying, no, but I also need this or can I have this? I could really use this.

Oh, I want this so bad. Oh, please can I have this? And they have a commercial right now on TV that's either 40 seconds or a minute of a child doing nothing but pestering their parent for a toy, and then in the last 15 seconds now they're a grown up with a car and they say, now I get what I want or some such thing. Most parents, I guess, have heard this sort of constant request mode from their kids.

Well, it's so refreshing if the child says, thank you for that wonderful thing you got me yesterday or this thing that I'm still enjoying. I really appreciate this thing that I have received. Well, we can apply that in the spiritual realm as well.

So Paul is thankful for these men that have accompanied him, these men that have been a comfort to him. You think about Paul. He's a prisoner.

This is an easy thing when you're under pressure, you have bad circumstances or you're in pain. As you get older, elderly people are sort of notorious for when you say, how are you? You almost don't want them to answer. Oh, well, the old lumbago and on and on and on.

You have to really be careful about saying how are you because you're liable to get an answer. And you think about Paul and all of the things he's been through. He doesn't recount his imprisonment and his shipwrecks and all of these other things.

When Paul gets the chance to talk to these people, he says, here are some wonderful believers that have been a comfort to me. You can see the thanksgiving in Paul's heart even as he commends these people. And what a wonderful thing.

Wouldn't it be great if it's a characteristic of us, even when we're under pressure or our circumstances are not so great, when there's an attitude of thanksgiving, we're going to be looking out for ourselves. We're going to be appreciating the people that God has put in our periphery. And when we have a chance to speak, this is part of speech that is gracious and seasoned with salt and knowing how to answer.

Someone may say, well, how is it with you? Well, I'll tell you, I have a wonderful friend or I have a wonderful spouse or I have wonderful people in my periphery. They're taking such good care of me. Instead of dwelling on here's all the bad situations, here's all my bad circumstances, what sort of a, you know, for people that are really concerned about the testimony they have before others, what kind of a testimony is that? You sound like you're just a needy person in all kinds of dire straits instead of someone that is in the hands of God and in the fold of grace.

And you can see this in Paul. There's a lot. Paul could have filled all the pages of this letter with his trials and tribulations, but instead he closes out by saying, I've got some great guys here.

I've got Aristarchus and Tychicus and Mark and Justice. I've got Epaphras in verse 12, who is one of you. Isn't it interesting? Probably the lowliest person in the congregation at Colossae is Onesimus.

He's a runaway slave. He might be seen as coming back in disgrace or with his tail between his legs. But Paul says, Onesimus, he's one of you.

Then he turns right around and the pastor of the church, the guy that would be at the top of the totem pole by a human standard, Paul says, Epaphras. Oh yeah, he's one of you too. So you see the wonderful, gracious view in Christ that everyone is on a level playing field in Christ.

We all have the same opportunities. We have the same value and worth before God. Onesimus, the runaway slave, he's one of you.

Epaphras, the pastor, he's one of you. He greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers.

Epaphras, one of the reasons he's a great pastor and he's a great believer and he's commended as no other believer except Timothy is by Paul, is because he understands the value of prayer.

It says laboring fervently. This is literally wrestling. He's wrestling for you in prayer.

So that, what is he praying for? What's his fervent desire that constantly brings the Colossian believers to his mind? So that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. The very things that Paul has addressed in this letter. This is what was on Epaphras' heart when he came to Paul.

He said to Paul, I want so much for us as a congregation, for the believers in our little house church there in Colossae, to be perfect and complete in the will of God. And these outside people are diverting and twisting and distorting and giving alternate persuasive arguments that are distracting and leading people astray. And so Paul writes this letter.

And Paul reminds them, this is the reason Epaphras came. This is the reason that he separated from them right now and sending greetings rather than bringing the letter. Because he's with Paul getting the additional ammunition that he needs.

And he is praying constantly for them that they may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. When you think about a believer and you want to pray for them, if you don't know exactly what the will of God may be in their circumstances, this is something you can always pray. You can pray for each other that we will stand in the plan of God.

We will stand and not fall. That we will be complete and have every resource available. That when the test comes, when the pressure comes, when the opportunities come and the positive things, the blessings come, that we will be perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Not miss those opportunities that don't seem so, I've seen this word now, impactful. Somebody has made a word now, it's not enough that we're going to impact someone as a verb, but now something can be impactful. I just made this major just, it's like fingernails on a chalkboard.

Anyway, we sometimes think the important things in the will of God are these things that have great influence and great effect and are quite visible. If we stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, we will see that it's in the details, it's in the small things, in the hidden things that God sees in secret but will reward openly one day. And Paul says in verse 13, I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you.

How can you perceive this in another person? You can imagine what it must be like if you could be a fly on the wall in a conversation between Epaphras and Paul. Epaphras shows up, he visits Paul in prison there and he begins to talk about the situation in Colossae and Paul can tell from the way Epaphras is talking about them and evidently they have prayed together because Paul knows the content of his prayers and this is something that tells us that praying out loud with one

another has been a practice from the earliest days of the church because Paul knows what Epaphras prays. He says he wrestles for you all, he struggles in prayer for you all because he's so anxious for you to stand perfect and complete.

Paul says he has a great zeal for you. This reminds me whenever you are around somebody that's in their engagement phase, they've fallen in love and they're engaged and they're about to be married and you get into a conversation with them, you can't talk about anything for more than five minutes. Pretty soon the conversation is going to turn to, we're talking to some young lady and she's engaged to Bob, well within five minutes, oh Bob likes to fish or oh Bob has a new car.

That person is just constantly on their mind and you can tell that they're just in the infatuation stage of true love because the person that they love is just always on their mind and will keep cropping up in conversation and you can tell that that's a big central thing in their soul and in their heart. Paul can see this in the heart of Epaphras and hopefully we have that in our souls for each other, that we are praying for each other and that we're struggling for one another in prayer and we have a great zeal for one another because this goes beyond just the ones that are in his particular church. Paul says Epaphras has a zeal for those who are in Laodicea and those who are in Hierapolis.

But you'll notice that these are people that Epaphras has in his periphery. They're people he knows about. They're people he's acquainted with and this is another great principle of prayer that we've touched on before that you're most effective in prayer on things that you know about, things that you're acquainted with and these are our prayer opportunities, the things that we can bring before God in an intelligent way and we can make doctrinal arguments to God.

We can argue based on principle. We can argue based on the character of God and when I say argue, I mean pray with confidence, knowing that God will answer because this is a valid request. It's a valid observation.

We can say, Lord, this believer needs the support of the Holy Spirit, needs to remember the principles and promises and doctrines that are in their soul so that they can stand perfect and complete and reflect the glory of our Savior and so forth and we can pray that with confidence. We know that's the will of God because we see it in the Word of Truth. He has a great zeal for you and those who are in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis.

So there's Epaphras, two verses dedicated to him. Then in verse 14, Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. So you can see that each of these people that have been mentioned in this latter part of chapter 4, they have an area where they're really good at something.

They have a niche. They have a function in the body of Christ. Some of them are great at being companions for those who are in active ministry.

Some of them are great at support. Some of them are great communicators. They're great

emissaries and representatives.

Some of them are great at communicating to others and making needs known. Some of them are great prayer warriors. Some of them are great communicators of truth or communicators of the gospel or teachers of the gospel.

You have Paul and Epaphras and Mark in that category. Then you have others that are in the structure. But in Paul's mind, they all have an important place.

They're equally commendable. They're beloved. They're faithful.

They're true warriors in the conflict. And it doesn't matter if they're a runaway slave or they're a pastor. It doesn't matter if they're a companion of longstanding or someone they just met, like Jesus who was called Justice.

It doesn't matter what's in their history. You look at Mark, and he had this terrible failure that split up the ministry team of Paul and Barnabas. And he's recovered.

And Paul commends him just as highly as if nothing had ever happened and says, He was useful to me. He's helpful. And he goes on to be helpful to Peter.

And you have here Luke, the beloved physician. We know a lot about Luke from the two books that he wrote, which are the Gospel of Luke and Acts. He is beloved.

This is another indication that he's a great companion and friend to Paul. He's traveled with him and been there for comfort and encouragement, someone to bounce ideas off of, someone who's an encouragement. Luke is taking notes about the ministry of Paul, and he's going to compile these into his travel accounts in the book of Acts.

You have the We sections that indicate this. It's a pretty famous observation in Acts. You're going along, and Luke is describing things, and he says, So-and-so went here and did this.

So-and-so went there and did that. He talks about everyone in the third person until you get to Acts 16. Then he starts saying, We went here, and we went there, and we did this, and we did that.

It indicates that he's traveling along with Paul. It's very subtle. He doesn't make an issue of himself, but he slips into the first-person plural.

We did these things. You find that in Acts 16. Then he stays behind in a town, and Paul goes off and does some things.

Then in chapter 20, verse 6, it asks you to find another We section. Luke is obviously traveling with Paul again in chapter 20 and chapter 21. Then you have another gap in chapters 22 through 26.

Then in chapter 27 and 28, the last two chapters of Acts, Luke is with Paul again. Luke is with him here at this point. He's a physician.

We know that Paul had some physical problems due to his beatings and the terrible toll that his ministry took on him, his imprisonments and his being stoned at Lystra and all the other things. He apparently had some physical ailments. Here's Luke.

He was able to minister to his physical needs. One of the reasons Paul is able to be the Apostle Paul is because Luke is with him. Luke can bring him up tees or bandage his wounds or massage his twisted muscles or whatever else physicians were able to do in those days, whatever the medical knowledge was that existed at the time.

Luke is able to exercise that on behalf of Paul and anyone else who's with him. They're constantly getting bobbed and locked up and shipwrecked and one thing and another. There's Luke to minister to physical needs.

This is a great area of opportunity. It doesn't sound like much, but you look at the place that Luke has, just by watching. Like Yogi Berra says, you can observe a lot by watching.

Here's Luke who is tending to his needs, but he's storing up these memories and these experiences. He's going to be able to write them down and minister to millions upon millions of believers in the inspired pages of Scripture. At the time, he may not have even known that he was going to set these things down, but it turns out he's an eyewitness and has access to a lot of the early sources of material.

He's able to compile these together. He's diligent. He's careful.

He's methodical. These are parts of his personality and his character that God can use in a great way. He may not have even been aware of it at the time.

He may have wearied sometimes of the laborious and tedious parts of the traveling and the hardships of it, but here, look what a great benefit it has been to the church down through the ages. If we don't get anything else from this last and closing section of the book, remember that you have no idea what your seemingly small and seemingly invisible opportunities are going to mean later on. There are famous stories about these obscure little revival preachers who were off someplace, and there's a guy that's practically unknown that preached a revival, and Billy Graham came to Christ.

Then you look and see what became of Billy Graham. God can use us in ways that we have no idea, but the most important thing is to remember that even then, there have been many revival preachers that nobody famous came out as a fruit of their ministry, but their faithfulness to the gospel and their faithfulness to their calling, that's the measure. That's the monument.

Even if we don't see it in this life, even if it never makes the pages of the history book, God sees. God knows. God appreciates.

God will reward. God will bounce His glory off of the likes of you and me throughout all eternity if we're faithful in the little things, faithful in the role that is set before us, the one talent or the two talents that we've been handed. We can't afford to forget that.

It's too easy to look around and say, well, the big opportunities are not within my reach. I'm not in a place of impact. I'm not in a place of service.

My gifts and talents are few and small. That's what that hymn says. Our talents may be few and these may be small, but what God asks from us is our best and to make the most, to redeem the time.

And even if it is in nothing more than our household daily responsibilities, it counts. It's just as important as someone who's out there in front of crowds, someone who's out there, high visibility, high impact, and so forth. In God's mind, it's all about transformation of the soul.

And you can see it in the example of each of these men. They each have an area. Epaphus is not Luke the physician.

Luke is not Epaphus. Luke never apparently pastored a church. You have Mark, and he has a particular mission.

And each of them is different. Each of them has an area of opportunity. Some of them are better in prayer than others.

Some of them are better in communication and encouragement and strengthening hearts than others. But each of them has that area of opportunity, and that's what they're exploiting. Notice in verse 14, in addition to Luke, the beloved physician, we have... Oh, let me say one other thing about Luke.

Turn to 2 Timothy 4, verse 11. Fairly little-known fact about Luke. 2 Timothy 4, verse 11.

This, of course, is the last letter that we have from the hand of Paul before his death. He is in prison. This is his final imprisonment.

He's going to be beheaded before he leaves this prison cell. And in this verse that we've just read in Colossians 4.14, we have Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas mentioned together. They both send their greetings.

But look at 2 Timothy 4, verse 11. Only Luke is with me. Now look back up at verse 9. 2 Timothy 4.9. Be diligent to come to me quickly, for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world and has departed for Thessalonica.

Crescens has left and gone to Galatia. Titus has gone to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

Luke sticks it out to the end. Evidently, things got too tough, too unpleasant, too tedious. There were bigger and better things.

There were attractions out in the world. And Demas, who is commended right along with Luke over in Colossians chapter 4, has faded out of the picture in 2 Timothy chapter 4. He got distracted by the things in the world. He should have paid attention to the letter to the Colossians in which he was mentioned and in which he is commended.

That's the whole message of Colossians. Don't get caught up in the things of the world. Don't lose sight of where the opportunities are, what life is all about, what really counts.

Demas was right there with Paul, right there with Luke and Mark and Tychicus and Epaphus. What a great circle of acquaintances. What a company to be traveling in.

But you have Mark who failed at the beginning but finished strong. You have Enesimus who failed miserably at the beginning and had no standing and finishes strong. And here you have Demas who has every opportunity and fades out.

Who doesn't keep his eyes on the objective. Who can't absorb and act on what Paul is teaching. And his legacy, his heritage, the last mention of him in the New Testament is that he forsook Paul having loved this present world.

He bugged out. What a commentary on one's life. It's the last thing we want to have said about us at the judgment seat of Christ.

Well, started well, heard teaching from the Word of God but got distracted. Fell for some philosophy or some brand of Christianity. Fell for some false standard, some false measure and left the narrow path.

That's what happens to Demas. There's no guarantee that just because you're sitting at the feet of the Apostle Paul, just because you have access to good teaching from the Word of God, just because you're in the company of fellow believers who are moving in the right direction, that you're not going to fall prey to attack or that you're not going to be distracted. Each of us has to captain his own ship.

Each of us has to live his life and be responsible for his soul before the Lord. And here's Demas in the company of these great men and he fades out. So that's not the heritage that we want to have for our lives.

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. Verse 15 of Colossians 4, greet the brethren who are in Laodicea. This tells us that we can, in fact, speak to believers outside our own church.

This is almost unheard of today. Oh, you go to the church down the road. We're just sort of polite and vaguely distant.

Paul says, look, exchange letters. I'm going to send a letter to Laodicea. You all need to read it.

You all need to send your letter down there and let them read your letter. You look at all of the commerce and traffic and visiting and prayer and the interaction between churches. What happened to that? There's a Baptist church and a Methodist church on the same block.

Those people won't even hardly nod to each other on Sunday mornings. We've gotten so segregated. We're under the condemnation of 1 Corinthians 1. I am of Paul.

I am of Apollos. I am of this denomination. I am of this church.

We've gotten very closed-minded and very inflexible. And us in particular, we believe that we understand what the Word of God is teaching, that we have begun to see what this life entails and what the Christian calling is all about. If there's anyone who ought to be flexible, if there's anyone who ought to be open, if there's anyone who ought to be relaxed and able to cope with relationship with any kind of a believer of any stripe from any denomination with any kind of weird ideas about the Word of God, it's us.

If we are, in fact, apprised of the truth, if we do understand the nature of God's power in our lives, we ought to be the ones who can flex, who can be relaxed and joyful and gracious and have conversations seasoned with salt in any form of company, not feel awkward, not feel embarrassed, not feel uptight, not feel looked down upon, not be uncomfortable. If we, in fact, do understand the power of God and if it's active in our souls, that ought to be the advantage we have over someone who doesn't understand those things. The power of God ought to be doing something for us.

And we ought to be like an older sibling in a family of children. We may still be a child, but if we're the older sibling, there's more expected than us. We ought to know better.

We ought to be able to last, to put up with, to forbear, to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, and all of the other wonderful attributes that God's power can create in our souls. That ought to be us. If we find ourselves uptight, if we find ourselves lacking in grace, lacking in flexibility, lacking in comfort in speaking to other believers, maybe we don't know as much as we think we do.

Maybe we're not as far along as we'd like to think we are and we need to go back to cultivating our relationship with God because that ought to be us. We ought to be those who are looking out and are being a blessing to others rather than those who are vibrating and reacting and getting uptight and falling apart and unraveling in the presence of other believers. Maybe they do understand something that we don't.

If they're the ones who are relaxed and at ease and we're the ones who are uptight and vibrating, and that has sometimes happened in churches and in groups that focus on the teaching of the Word of God but somehow miss the growth that's supposed to accompany that concentration, so we need to check ourselves and make sure we are in the faith. We need to be cultivating that thankful, gracious, seasoned with salt presence of the Logos in our souls. And if we find ourselves starting to lose that balance, how do we get it back? Think about the things that Paul has detailed in this letter.

Where we stand in Jesus Christ, what the basis of worth is in the plan of God, what the opportunities are, and not let our thinking get skewed by these pervasive, persuasive, common misconceptions about what Christian life is all about. It's easy to get deflected unless we keep our focus on these things that Paul has put before us in his letter. Greed together in her Laodicea and Memphis and the church that is in her house.

And my preference here, there's good arguments on both sides, but I think the weight of the evidence favors Memphis as a gracious lady who hosts a church in her home, just as we have ladies in our group who host our Bible class and you can see that even that is another area of opportunity, an area of ministry. This is the only mention we have of Memphis, but she's apparently a wonderful lady who does the seemingly mundane chores involved with providing a place where people can worship and fellowship in the Word of God. But she gets an eternal mention in the Scriptures.

In verse 16, Paul says, when this epistle is read among you, and this tells us that you have the communication of the Word of God where everyone sits quiet and the Word is spoken, which is the format that we tend to follow in our worship. The epistle is read among you. See that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans.

They have to have a concern for those Laodiceans. Let's get a copy of Paul's letter down to them so that they can benefit from it and see that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. This, in a broader sense, is a reminder to us that all Scripture is God-breathed.

It's all profitable. In the closing verses of this book, Paul says, Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry that you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it. That's really the message of the book to us.

Archippus is the son of Philemon and his wife. You can find this out in Philemon. He's filling in for Epaphras, apparently, but we don't know exactly what that ministry is, and that's on purpose because each of us has a ministry that we need to take heed to fulfill.

Salutation by Paul's own hand. It's the mark of the authenticity of his original letters. He closes with, Grace be with you.

Amen. And that's where we close our study. Let's close in prayer.

We thank you, Father, for the word of truth that is before us. We thank you for the principles that we've learned from this letter.