
Christ – Supreme & Sufficient *in fellowship*

Colossians 4:7-18

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Introduction FELLOWSHIP – a remarkable achievement of the gospel. Over the last month we worked our way through the letter of the apostle Paul to the Colossians with hope of making clear the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

In week one, we saw His supremacy and sufficiency in preview. Chapter 1:1-14 gave us a glimpse of what to expect in this striking letter. It was to reassure us and remind us that Christ is more than enough for all that we will ever need.

In week two we saw His supremacy and sufficiency in full view. Chapter 1:15-2:7 were written to both amaze us and to exhort us into obedience. By providing an exalted description of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the church is to be held to Christ and kept away from false teaching. Christ is the image of the invisible God, and everything created, whether earthly or heavenly, is created to demonstrate that Christ is the agent and sustainer and goal of all (1:15-17). Through the work of Christ on the Cross, Paul declares, we are set free from the fear of demonic forces and set free from the burden of our guilt. We are full and we are free in Jesus Christ.

In week three we saw His supremacy and sufficiency under attack. Chapter 2:8-23 gave us three warnings and one application to keep us vigilant and wise to the cunning tactics of errant teachers who claim to have something better than the supreme and sufficient Christ seen clearly in the gospel.

Last week we noticed the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in daily living. What it looks like to live in and under the Lord Jesus Christ was spelled out for us by the apostle in chapter 3:1-4:6. In various roles and relationships Christ's people were to reflect and represent the supreme and sufficient Christ.

This week we will conclude our month long study the way the apostle Paul concludes his letter. Turn with me to Colossians 4:7-18 as we give ourselves to Paul's concluding remarks and instructions. My aim in this message is to help you see the remarkable achievement of the gospel; namely FELLOWSHIP. The gospel does not merely transform individuals. The gospel's power creates a whole new family. In this new realm there is no inferiority of one person or class to another. People of completely diverse origins are gathered together in unity and purpose in Christ. They share a common allegiance to their Master who saved them and is transforming them and is keeping them for himself. Christ is all that matters; he permeates and indwells all members of his body, regardless of color, class or upbringing. And in this perfect unity, these people are focused upon the work of the kingdom of God. They sense that there is a mission to accomplish. And they long to be a part of it.

What is the gospel's remarkable achievement? This morning, I want to give you hope. I want to give you a glimpse of the power the gospel has to transform your life. But greater still, I long to give each of you a sense of mission/purpose/belonging in gospel fellowship. Christ Jesus did not die on the cross merely to get us to heaven. He died in our place in order to reconcile us to God and each other into a unity of fellowship that has a focus. What is the gospel's remarkable achievement? Let's look together at vv.7-18. <Read passage>

Christ – Supremacy and Sufficiency in fellowship

v.7-18

Some of those who have experienced the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ are mentioned in the last few paragraphs of this magnificent letter. As we close out the letter to the Colossians and our month long study of it let us notice what fellowship shaped by Christ looks like.

Tychicus

v.7-8

(see Acts 20:4; Eph.6:21; 2Tim.4:12; Tit.3:12)

Here in vv.7-18 we have a description of the Master's servants in fellowship. In v.7-8 Paul tells the church in Colossae about the one who is delivering the letter to them. His name is Tychicus. Along with several others, Tychicus was a close associate with Paul during the latter stages of his difficult ministry. In Acts 20:4 he is mentioned as a native of a province of Asia who was with Paul in Greece and journeyed with him to Troas at the end of the third missionary journey. This third missionary journey of Paul's was a most difficult ministry. As you read these accounts, you notice that Tychicus was a man transformed by the gospel. He was not reluctant to risk taking. He witnessed riotous activity against the gospel. He was likely with Paul when death threats were made against the ones carrying the gospel. He saw beatings and suffered along with the apostle. Somehow he got to Rome to be with Paul in prison. Perhaps he was with Paul on the sea when the ship was threatened by the storms. Could it be said of him what was said of Paul "as servants of God...by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger...through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise...treated as impostors yet are true; as unknown yet well known, as dying yet we live; as punished yet not killed; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing yet possessing everything (cf. 2Cor.6:4-10)?

He is commended in v.7 as "the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant". Tychicus was dear to and quite valuable to the apostle. A faithful colleague and helper in the service for the Lord was Tychicus.

Now, Tychicus was given two tasks by the apostle. He was to deliver Paul's letter and was to discuss Paul's labors. Here we see an extraordinary man with an ordinary assignment. Here we see a man equal to Paul and yet subordinate to Paul. Here we witness Paul's errand boy. What is the gospel's remarkable achievement? The first thing we can notice about the Master's servants in fellowship is one of humility and teamwork.

Paul wrote the sublime theology of Christ and the church we've read about in this letter. But we would not have heard it without Tychicus' ministry of delivering such a writing. Common and loyal was Tychicus.

Onesimus

v.9

(see Phil.10,16)

The next servant of Christ we come to is in v.9. His name is Onesimus. He is described as a faithful and beloved brother. Notice that he gets the same description as Tychicus and Epaphras (though not "minister" or "fellow-servant"). This suggests that Onesimus is equal to Tychicus and Epaphras; two strong leaders in the faith.

Who is Onesimus? V.9 describes him as "one of you". This means that he was from Colossae. I encourage you to get to know this man by reading the letter to Philemon. What we find out about him is that he was native of Colossae. He was a slave to Philemon. He personally wronged Philemon by stealing from him and then running away. He sought a new life by running away from the Lycus valley and traveling over 1,200 dangerous miles to start up this new life in Rome. And when he arrived who did he meet? We read that in God's providence he met Paul who taught him the gospel. By the Lord's doing Onesimus became a Christian. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon and gave it to Tychicus and Onesimus to carry back to Philemon. Transformed from a useless thief into a useful servant Onesimus was forgiven of his debt and now he is part of this fellowship. He was to team up with Tychicus to tell the church of "everything that has taken place here".

This slave was to receive the same warm greeting from the church that Tychicus was to enjoy. The church would have known about his past. But the church now needs to know about what the gospel does to people. Master Jesus got a hold of Onesimus and was making him into a useful man.

Aristarchus, Mark & Justus; the Jews

v.10-11

(see Acts 19:21; 20:4; 27:2; 2Tim.4:11; Philemon 23-24; Rom.16:7)

Having seen the wonderful achievements of the gospel in this odd couple of Tychicus and Onesimus we now come to a trio. Their names are Aristarchus, Mark and Justus. By calling them men "of the circumcision" we can surmise that this group is Jewish. So here we have Jewish Christians who help to comprise this fellowship that the gospel has created.

First, Aristarchus. He is described as Paul's "fellow prisoner". We know little about this man. We do know that his faith cost him much. He was with Paul as a prisoner. Sitting and suffering in prison Aristarchus desires to greet gladly other Christians. He wants them to be encouraged by Paul's letter. He undoubtedly was praying for this small church some 1,200 miles away. The brief description in v.10 gives us insight into the remarkable achievement of the gospel; creating and changing people like Aristarchus.

Next we come to Mark the cousin of Barnabas. (see Acts 15:37,39; Philemon 23). We have some insights into this man by reading Acts and details about how Paul's second missionary tour began. In this scene, we see Barnabas and Paul having a sharp disagreement over ministry. When Paul suggested to Barnabas that they should pay a

second visit to the churches that they had planted on their previous missionary journey, Barnabas agreed. He mentioned that they should bring Mark his cousin with them. Mark had been with them through the first missionary journey in AD 48. Now, one year later, Paul disagreed strongly on the basis that Mark defected from the ministry earlier when times were tough. This demonstrated to Paul that Mark had significant defects in his character and would not be helpful in ministry.

Fast forward the story now to AD 60 approximately ten years later, and where do we find Mark? We find Mark back on the team. And he is to be treated by the church like the other leaders. What insights can we glean from this description regarding the remarkable achievements of the gospel? Bitter breaks that have been repaired by the gospel are sweet victories.

Finally, we come to v.11 and to a man we know nothing about. His name was Jesus who was called Justus. A name named among some of the greats. What does this suggest regarding what the gospel does to people?

The final description about these men I want to focus on is seen in the word “only” v.11 says, these are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God. Paul’s understanding of the gospel was that it had a mission to join together Gentile believers with Rome’s Jewish converts. Paul desired to see this unity in Rome and so he pushed this emphasis. He tried undoubtedly to get more Jewish converts to come with him in this ministry. And it did not go over too well. According to this description, there were only three men of the circumcision who caught the vision. Let us not miss the clues Paul gives in these verses as they relate to ministry and fellowship.

Epaphras, Luke & Demas; the Gentiles

v.12-14

(see 1:7; Phi.23; Rom.15:30; 2Tim.4:11; Acts 16:10; 2Tim.4:10; Phil.24)

Combing through this last section we come to another trio. They are seen in v.12-14. These three represent Gentiles. Epaphras was the church planter at Colossae. They knew him well. He is spoken of here in high terms. This is partly due to the false teachers of the day who attempted to discredit the “common church leader”. But it also is here to describe one of the effects the gospel has on people and fellowship. To concisely put it, Paul describes these three people to make a couple of points.

The first point can be seen when you read these three together. There is something unusual when you do this. It reads like this. “Epaphras = wow! And Luke =beloved and Demas...”

When I reread these verses, it sounded like something might be going on with Demas. The contrast at least suggests that Paul might have been seeing something in him. This hunch might be confirmed when we read of Demas four years later in 2Tim.4. He fell in love with the world and departed from Paul. What does this suggest about our theme today of the remarkable accomplishments of the gospel?

The second point I believe Paul makes with this group is seen in the contrast with the preceding trio. The effects of the gospel bringing together 3 Jews and 3 gentiles into one fellowship is awesome. We cannot appreciate the profound impact of the gospel in this description. The Colossian church could. The Laodicean church could. The point here is that a radical difference in background and culture making them into one strong team is

another exhibit of the remarkable achievement of the gospel. This is true fellowship. This is intentional fellowship. This is the fellowship the gospel creates.

Paul; the apostle of Christ Jesus

v.15-18

In vv.15-18, we see a shift from other people greeting the church to Paul greeting the church. He sends his love to the brothers at Laodicea (possibly church leaders). He sends his love to Nympha and the church in her home. Paul was most pleased with this lady who opened up her home to allow the house church in Laodicea to start and continue. She is part of this awesome description of the effects the gospel has on God's people. Hosting a house church is no small task...but apparently it is a most valuable one and satisfying at that.

Paul continues to greet people he never met. His concern was for the churches wherever they were. He knew that the gospel of Jesus Christ was about church planting and church growing. He knew that the mission of the kingdom of God was starting and sustaining local fellowships across the known world. His love for and concern about these small churches in the Lycus valley demonstrate something amazing about the upshot of gospel ministry.

Also notice Paul's instructions. He tells the Colossians to read this letter and then give it (or a copy of) to the Laodacians. And too, when the Laodacians are done with their letter they are to give it to the Colossians in order for them to read it. Furthermore, we see in the instructions of Paul that Archippus is to fulfill the ministry that he had received in the Lord. I take this ministry to be one of preaching the word. This idea of a ministry that he received points back to chapter 2:6 and what the Colossians had received. This reception was the proclamation of Christ (cf. 1Cor.15:1-3). Archippus likely was a preaching elder of the church and he was to continue in his ministry.

All this underscores the importance of Scripture in churches. Gospel fellowship cannot survive without God's word. They were to read and hear and share and preach God's Word.

Finishing our observations we come to v.18 and the last verse in the letter. Here, we see the apostle Paul affectionate and vulnerable.

Paul's custom was to dictate his letters to his secretary (see Romans 16:22). Having dictated this letter to a partner in the gospel, Paul stops with dictation and picks up the pen. He tells the church at Colossae that he is writing this greeting with his own hand. We can observe in this statement evidence of special affection for the church. Oh, how Paul loved them. This statement also served as a sign of genuineness. The false teachers were circulating letters too (and some of them would use Paul's name on their erroneous letters; cf. 2Thess.3:17).

The amazing achievement of God's gospel and grace in the life of Paul shines forth here. The one who desired to kill Christians and stop the Christian movement is now demonstrating affection for people and concern for truth. These are characteristics of gospel fellowship. One who is under house arrest and was accustomed to freely traveling 1000's of miles...now confined to four walls says two things 1) "Remember my chains" and 2) "Grace be with you". What a large yet vulnerable heart Paul had. No superman here. The suffering he felt. Desire for freedom he had. But greater still was his longing for

grace to not merely be to the church. He wanted grace to be with the church. GRACE BE WITH YOU.

IN CONCLUSION let's look at these servants as representatives of the awesome power and purpose of the gospel. As I placed these people before me I began to see some characteristics of the Master's servants in fellowship. Look at them as I apply them to us in order to receive grace and guidance for our fellowship at the Chapel.

12 marks of the Master's servants in fellowship

These servants in fellowship are...

1. humble servants (Tychicus)
 - a. Tychicus was a seasoned and qualified man. The tasks we see him assigned are to deliver Paul's letter and discuss Paul's labors. We have no extant writings from Tychicus. He was not a published author. Paul, down through the centuries, has had many people write about him. I've never come across a biography on Tychicus. He simply carried other people's works and talked about other people's ministries. He was an extraordinary man tasked with an ordinary job. Are you a Tychicus? Does this give you grace and guidance?
2. forgiven sinners (Onesimus)
 - a. Onesimus was a disloyal slave. At the bottom of the social class, he was self-reliant and authority-rejecting. He thought he could make life work apart from Jesus Christ...And then his eyes were opened and he turned from his sins to trust Christ. He was a useless slave. Now he is a useful servant. Are you an Onesimus? Does this give you grace and guidance?
3. oddly matched (Tychicus & Onesimus)
 - a. Tychicus and Onesimus were to team up in a ministry. They were to minister together. They traveled many days together. They shared in much pain and joy. Where do you see yourself in this oddly matched couple? Notice how the Master puts his teams together. Perhaps you are teaming up in a certain ministry with one who is different from you. Rejoice and enjoy God's grace. Get to know this person well. Appreciate God's grace in their lives.
4. counting the cost (Aristarchus)
 - a. Aristarchus, a fellow prisoner tells us that gospel fellowship is teamwork and costly. Does your Christianity cost you much? Are you teaming up to transform lives even when you know it will cost you time, convenience, energy, money and perhaps safety? Look to Christ for the grace needed to enjoy this type of fellowship.

12 marks of the Master's servants in fellowship

These servants in fellowship are...

5. brought back together (Mark)

- a. Mark represents the power of the gospel to restore and repair relationships within ministry and fellowship. This tells us that we are still battling sin in our lives. It tells us that even in the great enterprise of gospel ministry pained relationships can occur. It tells us moreover that God is interested in repairing these breaks and breaches. And it tells us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful. It will repair the most severe breaks. Oh, will we believe this? Do we care about those we've offended in ministry? Will we call for those on the sidelines who have been offended in hope of restoring fellowship and partnership?

6. no names (Justus)

- a. Justus was not known...but us anyway. Yet it did not seem to bother him. He was on the team and he was contributing to the kingdom of God. What more could he possibly have asked for? Are we like this? Our names are not in the bulletin. They will not be passed down to the next generation. And yet, God's grace in fellowship is more than enough. We can gladly serve on a team with no recognition because the supreme and sufficient Christ is more than enough.

7. hard workers (Epaphras)

- a. Epaphras more than once was characterized as a hard worker. Oh, that Christ's supremacy and sufficiency will energize us and equip us to simply work hard. Staying focused on the main thing; the kingdom of God, we will by grace work hard. We will for His glory put our hands to ordinary tasks whole-heartedly. This will be a mark of the Master's transforming power our lives.

8. beloved (Luke)

- a. Luke is called the beloved. In 3:12, the church is called the beloved. Do you see yourself under the love and affections of God. Do you believe this to be true of yourself that the undying love of Christ pursues you and calls you His beloved? Servants in the Master's fellowship are to be resting in this reality. They are to realize and relish the wonders of being loved by God. Are you giving your heart to that? Do you sense His love for you who are in Christ?

12 marks of the Master's servants in fellowship

These servants in fellowship are...

9. susceptible to the allurements of this world (Demas)

- a. Demas just four years after the letter to the Colossians was sent departed from the ministry to go back to Thessalonica and fall in love with the world. Even though we might be effectively serving in gospel fellowship today we must see ourselves as susceptible to the allurements of the world. If you see signs in your life that you are beginning to fall out of love for the ministry and in love with the world don't delay. Don't think that it will just go away. Come for help. Call or e-mail a mature believer. Call or e-mail your elder that you maybe restored and helped. May none of us forsake grace and veer off toward the temptations around us.

10. dissimilar and united (Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke & Demas)

- a. Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas represent dissimilarity that has been unified into a team focused on advancing the kingdom of God. Diversity is not only good. It is designed. This is how the Lord receives glory; namely by breaking down a natural and sinful bearers in relationships and ministry. And then using this fellowship to do extraordinary things. Let us not resist diversity. Let us ask for it. Let us pursue it. Let look different from each other and yet perfectly unity to each other. This is the power of the gospel.

11. hospitable (Nympha)

- a. Nympha is not talked about much but without her and her family the church would have no place to meet. Hospitality is a hallmark of Christianity. Use your homes for the gospel. Open your lives for His people. This could be seen in Flock ministry. This could simply mean that we have people over to our homes for the purpose of serving them. Nympha represents a mark of the Master's servants in fellowship. Ask the Lord for His grace in this ministry and then move out by faith to open your hearts and homes to His purposes.

12. demonstrate how people and truth matter (Paul)

- a. Much could be said concerning grace and gospel fellowship in light of the apostle Paul. I simply will highlight the obvious. He represents the value of loving people and truth. How people and truth matter should be noticeable in our fellowship. A high view of truth and a caring view of people are characteristic of those whose hearts are effected by grace. Let us be this type of Church. Let us strive to stay with the gospel when all around people are defecting from it. And let us tenderly and consistently pursue and welcome people. This is the mark of

For God's glory and our good, we want Clearcreek Chapel to grow...qualitatively and quantitatively. May the letter to the Colossians be the focus and the fuel for such growth. May grace be with us in order that our fellowship will have the 12 Marks of the Master's servants in fellowship. Amen