"FELLOW LABORERS"

Colossians 4:7-18
HRM – 6-25-2022



INTRODUCTION:

Who does God use in His ministry?

I. <u>FAITHFUL SERVANTS</u> like Tychicus (v. 7-8)

II. <u>TRANSFORMED CRIMINALS</u> like Onesimus (v. 9)

III. <u>FORMER FAILURES</u> like John Mark (v. 10)

IV. <u>LOYAL COMPANIONS</u> like Aristarchus and Justus (v. 10-11)

V. <u>PRAYER WARRIORS</u> like Epaphras (v. 12-13)

VI. <u>SKILLED PROFESSIONALS</u> like Dr. Luke (v. 14)

VII. <u>HOSPITABLE LAYMEN</u> like Nymphas (v. 15-16)

VIII. <u>DIVINELY-CALLED MINISTERS</u> like Archippus (v. 17)

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12/4/2016

INTRODUCTION:

"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." (I Cor. 3:9)

In the list of concluding greetings from eight of Paul's fellow-workers, a careful reading reveals the theme of: team ministry, working together in the mission of evangelizing the lost world.

NOTE: 3keyreferencestosuchunity-"fellowservant"(v.7); "fellowprisoner" (v.10); "fellow workers" (v. 11).

In the Bible it's interesting to observe the different types of people God used in His ministry. Consider the variety of people Jesus chose to make up His "dream team" of disciples; In the concluding words to the Colossians we observe the differences in personalities, gifts, backgrounds of Paul's fellow laborers. The Spirit of God, however, blends those differences together, through a common cause, to form a united force to fulfill a single goal.

Who does God use in His ministry?

I. <u>FAITHFUL SERVANTS</u> like Tychicus (v. 7-8)

V. 7

"All my state" - All things about me; details about Paul's condition and ministry, etc., would be passed on by Tychicus. They did not enjoy the luxury of telephone, the US Postal Service, Instant Text Messaging or Facebook, so both this <u>letter</u> and other <u>personal details</u> about how Paul was doing would be personally hand delivered by Tychicus, as he would travel by boat some 1200 miles from Rome to Colossae. He would deliver not only this letter but also the epistle to he Ephesians (SEE: Eph. 6:21-22), Philippians, & Philemon.

Paul gives 3 features about Tychicus and his personal character. Tychicus was a:

1) Beloved Brother -

"Beloved" = One who is loved with the love of God

"Brother" = V. 9, 15; Not physical but spiritual brother. A fellow believer, in the same family of God. The only basis upon which we can have fellowship, be fellow-servants, be fellow-laborers, or have fellow-<u>anything</u> - is because we are int he same family -- the family of God. (cp. II Cor. 6:14-18). We are brothers. Our cohesiveness is our brotherhood. Remembering that we are brothers will temper and determine how we treat each other.

2) "Faithful minister" -

"Faithful" = dependable, reliable, and trustworthy; one whose faith makes him faithful

"Minister" (diakonos) refers to one who serves others, who waits upon others

The Master Minister taught us that Greatness is in serving others

> "But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mt. 20:25-28)

"The greatest ability is dependability"

3) "Fellow servant" (sun + doulos) = lit. joint slave; a slave together with me; partners in serving Jesus Christ.

V. 8

"Comfort" = to encourage

Tychicus' goal in travelling over 1200 miles is to be a blessing. What unselfishness!

II. <u>TRANSFORMED CRIMINALS</u> like Onesimus (v. 9)

"With Onesimus" - Tychicus would have a one-way travelling partner. One way because Onesimus was going back home. Home to Colossae. Who is this man?

He was a runaway slave who had stolen from his master Philemon (a believer in Christ). As he fled to Rome, he crossed the path of the Apostle Paul and was led to Christ by Paul (Philemon 10 - "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.")

Now Onesimus was a new man! (II Cor. 5:17) A spiritually <u>profitable</u> man! (Philemon 11)

Onesimus, who formerly was a rebellious thief, a prodigal, a drifter, etc., is now called "a faithful and beloved brother." What a transformation Jesus makes!

His faithfulness was evident to Paul by how Onesimus helped Paul and proved profitable (SEE: Philemon 10-16).

"Who is <u>one of you</u>" - Onesimus was from Colossae. As a matter of fact, he was a servant of Philemon, whose house evidently was the place where the Colossians met for worship (with Archippus as pastor - 4:17, Phile. 2). Perhaps on several occasions Onesimus heard the Gospel, but it did not click until he hit rock bottom and met Paul.

III. <u>FORMER FAILURES</u> like John Mark (v. 10)

"Marcus" was also the divinely guided writer who penned the Gospel which bears his name: The Gospel According to Mark

"Marcus" = John Mark (Acts 12:12), the cousin of Barnabas. Mark was "restored to Paul's favor after his lapse (desertion) on the first missionary journey" (Ryrie note)

- Acts 12:25 (Mark Joins the Team);
- Acts 13:13 (Mark Quits the Team);
- Acts 15:36-39 (Conflict between Paul and Barnabas over Mark);
- II Tim. 4:11 (Paul's Request for John Mark) - "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.")

"Receive him" - Perhaps the word had gotten out that Mark had formerly been a <u>failure</u> on Paul's first journey (Acts 13:13, 15:38). Such a testimony may have caused the Colossians to hold Mark in suspect. Therefore, Paul reassures them to accept him (welcome him) if he should travel to Colossae.

When a believer fails and sins, even if he deserts the ministry or fellow believers, he is to be welcomed back with open arms once he has repented. We must not hold a person's failure and sin against him. Rather, we should be as Christ is to us.

John Mark is an encouragement to everyone who has failed in his first attempts to serve God (EX: Jonah)

IV. LOYAL COMPANIONS like Aristarchus and Justus (v. 10-11)

"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner" = my companion who is a captive with me.

Aristarchus was a believer from Thessalonica who faithfully accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2). For the same reason that Paul was imprisoned, so was Aristarchus. Perhaps he was even chained up with Paul.

A man who was willing to suffer with God's people for God's sake, Aristarchus was a bit like Moses, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." (Heb. 11:25)

"How encouraging it is to have a Christian at your side when everything seems to be against you" (Wiersbe, p. 144).

V. 11

"Jesus, which is called Justus" = Perhaps to show respect for the name of "Jesus," his Christian brothers referred to him as Justus rather than using the name of our Lord.

Respect for the name of Jesus is vital! To take His name in vain is sin!

Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus were "of the circumcision" (saved Jews). Among the Jews, these are the only ones who hung tight to Paul and helped him in team ministry.

It wasn't easy for these men to be faithful to Paul, for he had many enemies and faced much satanically-inspired opposition.

"My fellow-workers" - joint workers, co-laborers

"Unto the kingdom of God" - Paul's goal was to see souls added to God's future kingdom. Paul's labor & message was not to advance his own cause, nor some man-centered, materialistic, or humanistic cause -- But God's cause, the cause of Christ!

Acts 28:31 - "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

"A comfort to me" - an encouragement.

Even Paul needed comforting. Who encourages the encourager? Who comforts the comforter? ANSWER: The one who works with him

V. PRAYER WARRIORS like Epaphras (v. 12-13)

Since Epaphras was from Colossae, and the man who pioneered and started the Church of Colossae (Col. 1:7), he had a special burden for those people. A burden and love for people comes as you serve those people. Such a burden and love will always provoke you to prayer!

"Always" - not sporadic, infrequent intercession (Eph. 6:18 - "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints"; I Chron. 16:11- "Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually")

He did not merely pray when a crisis came.

"Laboring fervently" - agonizing, struggling.

Epaphras did not pray in a cold-hearted manner. He threw his whole soul and heart into it - straining every sinew and muscle, as Jacob did when wrestling with the Angel of the LORD.

The prayers of many are nothing more than an empty, hollow, vain group of cliches strung together and addressed to God.

"As a shadow has no power because there is no substance in it, even so that supplication, in which a man's proper self is not thoroughly present in agonizing earnestness and vehement desire, is utterly ineffectual, for it lacks that which would give it force (Ja. 5:16). 'Fervent prayer,' says an old divine, 'like a cannon planted at the gates of Heaven, makes them fly open.' The common fault with the most of us is our readiness to yield to distractions. Our thoughts go roving hither and thither . . . How great an evil this is! It injures us, and what is worse, it insults our God. What should we think of a petitioner, if, while having an audience with a prince, he should be playing with a feather or catching a fly?"

(Spurgeon, Morning & Evening, p. 31)

Two goals in Epaphras' fervent intercession:

1) A mature growth - "Perfect" = to mature, to reach the goal, to measure up to God's goal for you, as a mature soldier of Jesus Christ; fully equipped, having every piece of armor on, having grown in wisdom and spiritual understanding.

   Key request: Pray for the growth of others (Cp. Col. 1:9-11). Be specific!

2) A full assurance - "Complete" = lit. a "full-carrying" (pleros = full; phero = to carry).

The idea is a full assurance (heb. 6:11) or a total confidence in the total will of God. To carry in your heart, mind, and soul a full confidence in the promises of God. (EX: Hymn "Blessed Assurance Jesus is Mine")

The Colossians needed to be convinced of the absolute, total sufficiency of Christ! (Cp. Col. 2:6-10).

"I bear him record" - Paul could solemnly testify or witness that such fervent prayer was indeed the true practice of Epaphras.

"Praying that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing" (John H. Jowett)

VI. SKILLED PROFESSIONALS like Dr. Luke (v. 14)

"Luke, the beloved physician" - a companion of Paul - cp. Acts 16:10-17, 27:1 - 28:16 -- Note: "we" "us"

Luke, the writer of the third Gospel, was formerly a medical doctor, who gave his life to a superior practice - that of seeing the spiritually sick healed, the mortally wounded made whole, the sin-infected cured, the terminally depraved - saved!

"And Demas" - Why no elaboration? Why doesn't Paul call him "beloved," "faithful," etc.?

Perhaps the Holy Spirit (knowing that Demas would forsake Paul and would fall in love again with worldliness) restrained Paul from commending him (II Tim. 4:10 - "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica. . .")

VII. HOSPITABLE LAYMEN like Nymphas (v. 15-16)

"The church which is in his house" - "his" = "her" in NASV, NIV

Nymphas (a man of wealth) opened his home for church meetings. His home was God's home.

Hospitality:

Rom. 12:13 - "Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality."

Titus 1:8 - "But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate"

Heb. 13:2 - "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

I Pet. 4:9 - "Use hospitality one to another without grudging."

v.16 – "Cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans"

Because this letter to the Colossians was not a mere personal letter and not restricted to a particular people at a particular time, but rather was God's eternal word to apply to everyone, God intended for it to be spread around.

"The epistle from Laodicea" = the circular letter of Ephesians (SEE: Ryrie's Introduction to Ephesians). Laodicea was a short distance from Ephesus.

VIII. DIVINELY-CALLED MINISTERS like Archippus (v. 17)

"Archippus" – Whose name means "Master of the Horse" was not so much interested in horses but in people. He was the Pastor of people at Colossae (cp. Philemon 2)

"Take heed" - keep an eye on; see to it

"The ministry" - the service; ministry is serving others.

The table is the pulpit and the food is the Bible.

Feeding God's sheep is the service of the pastor (I Pet. 5:2; Jn. 21:16)

"Which thou hast received" - No true man of God is a self-appointed preacher. A ministry comes from God. God calls men to specific ministries.

--The O.T. priests were called of God - Heb. 5:4 - "And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."

--The N.T. pastor is called of God - Eph. 4:11 - "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

"Fulfill it" - to continually ("The ministry is a lifetime job" - Robertson) carry out your ministry to its fullest extent (without quitting; without half-hearted devotion; without lazy preparation; without compromise; without omitting any of the pastor's priorities).

II Tim. 4:5 – Paul said to Pastor Timothy - "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

CONCLUSION: V. 18

Paul, who had Timothy (cp. 1:1), as his amaneunsis, write this letter as he dictated it, concludes by signing it with his own hand.

"The chain clanked afresh as Paul took the pen to sign the salutation" (Robertson's Word Pictures).

"Remember my bonds" - Heb. 13:3 - "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

"Grace be with you" - lit. The grace be with you; pointing to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ - the only source of grace.

God uses a variety of people in His ministry, and He wants to use you!

***God wants you to be a fellow laborer in His work!**