

That You May Be Encouraged

Colossians 4:7-18

We have come to the end of the book of Colossians.
After spending more than a year in Genesis, it seems too short.
But the power of the message of Colossians is not diminished by its size.
Christ in you, the hope of glory!

And this mystery of Christ is enough, for in Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
But it is not enough to exalt Christ. It is that we too are exalted with Him, in Him.
And our union with Jesus Christ is not attained through any human means, but by faith alone.

You do not need secret rituals.
Nor is it through harshness to yourself that you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies.
Only through the means of faith are you joined with Christ.

Because of this union every power in the Universe has been overcome.
And you are enabled, even today, to strive to put your own sin to death and to put on God's righteousness.

And you are given the privilege of praying to God as your heavenly Father.

But the book of Colossians does not end as a theological treatise.
It ends with people. And people continue to face real-life challenges in the world in which they live.

Matthew 24:10-13 ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

People need encouragement.
They need...

Encouraging words
Encouraging prayers
Encouraging actions

Read Colossians 4:7-18.

Paul is confined as a prisoner. He cannot go to the Colossians.
So, he must send his letter with a courier. The postal service did not exist.

You may or may not like your mailman, but you most likely do not have as much affection for your mailman as Paul had for Tychicus.

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.

He is a
beloved brother
and
faithful minister
and
fellow servant
in the Lord.

How would you feel as these words were being read to the Colossians if you were Tychicus?
You would have been “encouraged.”

Paul is not using flattery. He is being truthful.
But he is openly articulating the truth that he feels.
Paul wants the Colossians to listen to Tychicus when he delivers the letter. So, he testifies of his relationship with him.

Tychicus is a beloved brother.

Paul has deep affection for Tychicus.
There is a strong bond between them.

Jesus had a similar bond with the Apostle John. The other disciples could see it. They even called John, “the one whom Jesus loves.”

But not only is Tychicus a beloved brother to Paul, he is also a faithful minister with him.

Tychicus has been Paul’s partner in the ministry at least since Acts 20. Paul trusted Tychicus. He would not hesitate to send Tychicus to carry on any ministry in his absence.

Tychicus was not Paul. Paul does not tell the Colossians that having Tychicus is the same as having himself. But what he tells them is that Tychicus is a true minister of the Gospel, a man who is faithful in ministering the mystery of Christ.

As I was meditating on Paul’s relationship to Tychicus, it became evident to me that this is the way I feel about Danny Beck.

I know what it is to have a beloved brother who is also a faithful minister. Daniel Beck is a man that I implicitly trust to declare the mystery of Christ clearly. What is more, he is a minister that I trust with your souls.

But it is Paul’s third statement of Tychicus that most made me think of Danny. Paul says that Tychicus is a “fellow slave in the Lord.”

The word is “syndoulos”. Literally it reads “with slave”. You have heard of the phrase, “a partner in crime”? Well Paul is saying that Tychicus is a “partner in slavery to Christ.”

And this is precisely how I feel about Danny. Other than his family, I get to see more than most the many ways in which Danny bows himself to the will of God in the service of Jesus Christ.

It is a beautiful thing. I am thankful for you my brother, my fellow minister, and my fellow slave in Christ.

Tychicus has lived his life in such a way that it has “encouraged Paul” – encouraging words and actions. And through his words, Paul is encouraging Tychicus.

Encouragement is the thread that holds together this entire passage.

It is the true purpose for the book of Colossians.

And it is the real purpose behind sending the letter with such a valued mailman.

8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose,
that you may know how we are
and
that he may encourage your hearts,

The Greek word for encouragement is Parakalew. It has a wide range of meaning.

It can mean anywhere from comfort to exhort.

Essentially, it means “to give courage to another”.

It is the same word used of the Holy Spirit – the Paraklete.

Even though the book of Colossians only makes one reference to the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit living in one believer that enables him or her to encourage another believer.

Just as God has come alongside us in our need, so we are to come alongside one another in daily life.

And as we come alongside one another, our primary means of encouragement is to point one another to Jesus.

Colossians 2:1-3 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

In Colossians 2, Paul makes clear that it is the body of Christ being knit together in love that does the encouraging. This bond of love is the product of the knowledge of God's mystery – which is Christ.

Paul has written this letter to recenter the Colossians in their confidence that union with Jesus Christ is all that they need for life and godliness.

It would make sense that the purpose of sending Tychicus is to further that purpose. In other words, the way in which people “encourage” one another is to point one another to Christ.

Our previous pastor, Sandy Curnow, developed a very clear and concise purpose statement for Faith Church.

We gather... to encourage faith and repentance.

We scatter... to fulfill the great commandment and the great commission in our various areas of influence.

That means that not only the preaching and teaching should encourage your faith and repentance, but also your interactions with one another.

Youth, how desperately do you need encouragement to trust in and follow Christ. But the truth is that you are often the worst at encouraging.

You so desperately want people to like you, that you are willing to tear others down in the search for love.

Gossip and slander come so easily.

Christ in you wants so much more.

He is working to transform the way that you relate to your friends.

The next time that you find yourself tearing down another person, stop yourself.

Remember that Christ lives in you. And His purpose is not to tear down, but to build up.

Having the goal of encouragement is only the beginning.

Knowing how to encourage is a lifelong struggle.

And young people, let me tell you the truth. Even as adults we struggle to know how to encourage.

In order to be an encouragement to someone, you must know the truth of the gospel message.

And you must also know something of the person you are trying to encourage.

Wisdom is applying the truth of Christ appropriately to each person.

Encouragement is so important to the Body of Christ that even though we are all commanded to be encouraging, God distributes the gifts of the Spirit so that some people are given a special gift of encouragement.

Romans 12:6-8 ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Encouragement is founded upon truth.

If you veer from the truth, any encouragement that is given will be short lived.

At the same time, we can often use truth like a club.

We convince ourselves that we have said what is right, and yet give little thought to the effect of our words or actions.

I know that this can be taken too far. We are not responsible for the reactions of others. And it is often the case that we can seek to encourage someone and the result is not immediate encouragement.

But I also think it is more often the case that we speak without really taking the time to understand. We judge a situation or a person with little thought of what may be going on in their heart. And the effect of our words or actions is not encouragement, but rather discouragement.

If someone is struggling in their faith, would they seek you out?

Are you someone with whom they can feel safe to share their weakness?

And after being with you, are they strengthened to keep believing in Christ and pressing forward in their faith.

Do people feel like you always have a personal agenda when you are with them?

Or do they genuinely understand that you are more concerned for their interests than your own?

And are you convinced that Jesus really is the One that people need?

In other words, do you seek to craft your encouragement around Christ?

I am not talking about clichés.

I am talking about making an honest attempt to apply the salve of Christ to wherever it is that someone is hurting.

I heard it recently said, “I regularly need to be brought to Jesus.”

That is so true.

Encouragement is helping one another to keep walking alongside of Jesus.

Romans 15:4-6 ⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope

You know those people in your life who after being with them, you are genuinely encouraged to trust more fully in Christ. Think about what it is about those people that is different and rare.

The world has long forgotten Tychicus. But those people who were encouraged by him to continue believing we will see in glory. And they will not have forgotten him.

The theme of encouragement continues with Onesimus.

⁹ and with him

Onesimus,

our faithful and beloved brother,

who is one of you.

They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Onesimus is the slave who Paul sends back to his master in the book of Philemon, hoping that Philemon will release him back to Paul for ongoing ministry.

Paul is sensitive to Onesimus in the way that he describes him to the Colossians. He refers to Onesimus using two of the three adjectives he used with Tychicus: faithful and beloved.

But Paul does not call Onesimus a “fellow slave”, like he did with Tychicus. Instead, he adds, “who is one of you.” This must mean that he is from that region. I love Paul’s sensitivity to the awkwardness of Onesimus’ situation.

Of course, Onesimus is a “fellow slave” with Paul. But since it is Paul’s hope that Philemon will free Onesimus, he does not use the word slave in describing him.

If you want to be an encourager, you will have some sensitivity to how your words will affect others.

Both Tychicus and Onesimus will fill the Colossians in on all the details about Paul’s situation. This is more than simply giving facts. Paul wants these men to explain to the Colossians that his imprisonment has not truly hindered the Gospel. He wants the Colossians to know that God is continuing to do His work of redemption even while Paul was in prison.

Paul wanted his actions to encourage the Colossians. The mystery of Christ is not only words to Paul. This truth has worked itself deep down into Paul’s soul. He is living out His union with Christ.

We all need to hear stories of others who are persevering in the faith when life gets tough.

We often think that we cannot obey Christ, we cannot continue believing. Seeing the example of others can encourage us, especially if that example is authentic.

What I mean by authentic, is that it includes the struggle with the overcoming. If you present an image that obedience has been easy for you, then the person who is deeply struggling with their own obedience, will not be able to relate to you.

But if you admit struggle, and even temporary failure, your endurance will be of great help to others.

Paul moves on to three men who are known for their Jewish heritage: Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus who is called Justus.

Paul lumps these three men together because they are his fellow laborers, and they are all “men of the circumcision”.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you,
 and
 Mark the cousin of Barnabas
 (concerning whom you have received instructions-
 if he comes to you,
 welcome him),

11 and
 Jesus who is called Justus.
 These are the only **men of the circumcision**
 among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God,
 and
 they have been a comfort to me.

Understanding the phrase “men of the circumcision” is important. In the book of Galatians, Paul speaks very negatively of a group called “the Circumcision Party”.

Galatians 2:12 ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

But Paul is not speaking negatively here. These men are Paul’s fellow workers. Paul also says explicitly that they have been a comfort to him.

Paul is referring to these men as good men, true believers in Christ, who came from a Jewish heritage.

Aristarchus is mentioned several times in the book of Acts as one of Paul’s traveling companions. He is a **Acts 27:2** a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

All we are told about him is that he is a “fellow prisoner” with Paul.

Mark is very likely the John Mark who was a relative of Barnabas.

The fact that Paul mentions Mark in an encouraging way is itself encouraging. In Acts 15, we learn that Mark was the cause of Paul and Barnabas having a strong disagreement and their parting ways.

ESV Acts 15:39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,

At that time, Paul was not convinced that Mark would be a help in the ministry. On the other hand, Barnabas believed in Mark.

As it turns out, Barnabas’ trust in Mark was justified. One means of encouragement is “believing” in someone even when there may be reason to doubt.

Ultimately, it is not believing in the person so much as believing in the grace of God working in the person. Nevertheless, Barnabas takes the risk that Paul was unwilling to take.

What is “encouraging” for us is that Paul here has reconciled with John Mark. And he now considers him to be one of his faithful workers.

ESV 2 Timothy 4:11 Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

And, it seems that Mark was not only useful to Paul. But at some later point, he was also useful to Peter.

ESV 1 Peter 5:13 She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.

It this same John Mark who is the author of the Gospel of Mark.

Pretty encouraging that someone who Paul once thought would not be a faithful laborer in the kingdom, by the grace of God, turns out to be one of the best.

Always remember, the people with whom you interact are still in process. God is not finished with them, just like He is not finished with you.

Believing the best in someone will open you up to the pain of disappointment. But it is worth it. May someone say to you, “Thank you for believing in me (Xp in me), when no one else did.”

We really do not know anything about this man Jesus who is called Justus.

Now Paul speaks of three more men who come from a Gentile background.

12 Epaphras,
 who is one of you,
 a servant of Christ Jesus,
 greet you,
 always struggling on your behalf in his prayers,
 that you may stand mature
 and
 fully assured in all the will of God.

13 For I bear him witness
 that he has worked hard
 for you
 and
 for those in Laodicea
 and
 in Hierapolis.

14 Luke the beloved physician greets you,
 as does
 Demas.

Luke is the author of both Luke and Acts.

We know little about Demas.

But they are all of Gentile heritage.

Again, the actions of these six men all being used in the Gospel work should be an encouragement.

The primary division in the Church at that time was between Jewish and Gentile believers. The actions of these men should encourage us all that by the power of Christ in you our natural divisions can be overcome.

And it is encouraging that Paul is not alone in the ministry. He is part of a team.

Epaphras is the minister who first brought the Gospel to the Colossians.

I find his example to be especially encouraging.

Epaphras feels the need to visit Paul in prison. Something Jesus commands us to do.

And as a reward for his efforts, he is also imprisoned.

ESV **Philemon 1:23** Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

The man who was once very active in planting the Church in Colossai, and in the surrounding towns, is now bound with Paul in prison.

Paul bears witness that Epaphras has worked hard for the Colossians and for those in Laodicea and Hieropolis. Of course, they would know this already.

But what Paul wants them now to know is that Epaphras is continuing to work for them, only now it is more pointedly through his prayers. He is...

always struggling on your behalf in his prayers,
that you may stand mature
and
fully assured in all the will of God.

Epaphras struggles for the Churches that he helped plant in ongoing intercessory prayer.

Paul wants them to know that Epaphras is engaging in prayer warfare for them.

This is important. Of course, Paul certainly prays for them as well. But because of Epaphras' natural connection to these believers, his burden for their continuing in the faith is more profound.

How encouraging is that?

If you find out that someone regularly goes to prayer on your behalf, you are encouraged.

Epaphras does not just say he will pray, God has given him a burden to pray for these believers.

Awesome.

Also, I want you to see the content of Epaphras' prayers.

Paul says that Epaphras prays that they would "stand mature and that they would be fully assured in the will of God."

He is praying for their faith. He is praying that they would grow up into Christ. He is praying that whatever happens to them that they would have confidence that God is working out His perfect will in their lives.

This is why I call this "encouraging prayers".

When you pray for someone, pray these sorts of prayers for them.

Pray for their daily bread. Pray for their physical health.

But pray for their faith. Pray that God would give them confidence in Christ.

Pray that God would strengthen their faith.

Paul has spoken of those who would carry the letter to the Colossians.

He has spoken of those who are remaining with Him, but who care about the Colossians.

Now Paul gives words of encouragement to the churches surrounding Colossai. These are people that are one step further removed from Paul's sphere of influence.

Paul has a healthy perspective that the Church is larger than what he can directly influence.

He wants to encourage the Church beyond his immediate ministry.

He begins with Laodicea. This Church is made infamous from the book of Revelation. Of the 7 churches there, it is the Luke warm church that is in danger of being spit out by Jesus.

But here in Colossians, this Church is just forming. And all we know about this church at this early stage is from Paul's brief words here.

- 15 Give my greetings
to the brothers at Laodicea,
and
to Nympha
and the church in her house.
- 16 And
when this letter has been read among you,
have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans;
and
see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.
- 17 And
say to Archippus,
"See that you fulfill the ministry
that you have received
in the Lord."

Paul's encouragement takes three forms.

1. A simple greeting.
2. A sharing of sound teaching.
3. An encouragement to a fellow pastor.

We should not overplay this greeting. Paul very simply wants the believers to know that he is interested in them. They may be brothers that he does not know personally. But they are brothers in Christ. And he wants them to know that there is affection on his part because of their mutual faith in Jesus Christ.

I do not feel the need to know personally every pastor in Burke County. But if they are preaching the truth of Christ, then I want them to know that I am thankful for their ministry. I want to greet them positively rather than critically, even if we may have differences.

Paul wants the letter to the Colossians to be read to the Laodiceans. And Paul has written a letter to the Laodiceans that he would like to be read in the Colossian Church.

This begins to lay the foundation for the letters of Paul being included in the canon of Scripture. Paul's letters have a personal aspect to them, but they are intended for the whole Church.

It is also interesting to note that we have a clear reference to a letter written by Paul that has not been preserved for us. I have always wondered how the Church would react if some archeologist discovered Paul's lost letter to the Laodiceans.

I have to rest in God's sovereign hand, trusting that the letters that have been preserved are the letters that God has intended to be preserved. And even though I have some curiosity as to the letter to the Laodiceans, it is more important to study and apply the Scriptures that God has preserved.

For our purposes, we can have confidence that God intended the book of Colossians for the larger Church. When we are encouraged by this Book, we are carrying on the intentions of Paul and God.

Thirdly, Paul sends a very brief encouragement to a fellow pastor. We know that Archippus is a fellow pastor because Paul calls him a "fellow soldier" in the book of Philemon.

Philemon 1:1-2 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

As someone who has been in ministry since I was 23 years old, it is always encouraging to hear words of encouragement from fellow ministers.

We do not have to assume that Archippus had quit ministering. We only need to know that the work of ministry can be challenging, and tiring, and that some ministers do leave the work.

Pastor can grow weary, or discouraged. We can only guess, but Archippus probably falls into this category. And Paul wants to give him a boost.

Paul wants to encourage Archippus to keep pressing on.

He reminds him to “fulfill” his ministry, to complete it.

I find this interesting because the one thing about working with people, is that the job is never complete.

But somehow, God knows the work to which He has called each minister.

And our task is to fulfill that work. To keep pressing on to the end.

Of course, that end happens when a minister dies.

There must also be some sort of changing of that work when a minister retires. I have not really crossed that road yet. Paul’s ministry certainly changed when he was put in prison. It did not end. But it did change.

All we can know from Paul’s words here is that he does not think Archippus’ work is finished. And since it is not finished, Archippus must carry on.

1 Corinthians 15:58 ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Encouraging words...

Encouraging actions...

Encouraging prayers...

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains.

Grace be with you.

Paul's style of signing this letter is a bit different than the way we sign letters. Instead of simply signing his name, he takes the time to personally write vv. 7-18 in his own hand. He would have had a distinct style that he knew that the Colossians would recognize.

Paul is adding a personal touch to this letter.

Paul ends with two very abrupt and very different statements.

Remember my chains.
Grace be with you.

Paul returns to the theme of his imprisonment.
Maybe he wants them to remember to pray for him.
Maybe he wants to remind them again that his imprisonment has not imprisoned the Word of Christ.
Maybe, the threat of their own imprisonment is real, and Paul wants them to draw encouragement from him in his imprisonment.

You may not fear the danger of imprisonment today. But you have fears. And those fears may cause you to doubt the grace of God.

Trials and tribulations and persecutions cannot extinguish the grace of God.

Nothing in this life can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. For in him and through him and to him are all things. And by his blood, he has purchased grace for you.

Paul's encouraging words are working in conjunction with the Grace of God to help people to keep pressing on in the faith.

The situation in which you find yourselves today does not matter. What matters is that the grace of God in Christ Jesus is sufficient to help you endure to the end.

1. Make it your ambition to encourage someone in their faith.

- a. In your words.
 - b. In your prayers.
 - c. In your actions.
2. Thank God for those He has used to encourage you in your faith.
 - a. Thank them if you have opportunity.
3. Be humble enough, and committed enough, when you need encouragement, to seek out someone who might give you encouragement.
 - a. You do not even have to ask directly.

Colossians is a book that focuses on one clear message.

It is a message that was just as relevant 2,000 years ago as it is today.

It is the message that without which Christmas is meaningless.

It is the only message that can match, and overcome, the evils of this world... and the evils in your heart.

It is a message that can only be received by faith. And once received, it is only really enjoyed by faith in this life.

What is that message?

It is the message that the One from whom and through whom and to whom are all things, has eternally united Himself with all who believe.

Colossians 1:27 Christ in you, the hope of glory

Your fellow brothers and sisters are in constant need of being reminded of the Greatness of Jesus.

And they need to be encouraged to believe that being united to Jesus, they will experience true glory with Him.

If it is true that believers need constant encouragement to continue believing in Christ, then it is equally true, that all who are outside the Church, outside of Christ, need to trust in the only One who can truly save them from their sins.

As you rub shoulders with people who do not know Jesus Christ, remember that Jesus is working through you to draw his elect to Himself.

Colossians 4:5-6 ⁵ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

1 Peter 3:15 ¹⁵ but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;

Evangelism is not all about preaching.

Evangelism is also about living.

All around you are lost people who desperately need Jesus Christ.

Believe that God is using your words, and actions and prayers to call them to Himself.

Blessing:

Romans 15:5

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.