

PAUL'S CO-LABOURERS IN THE MINISTRY

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

INTRODUCTION:

1. We are introduced to ten men in this final section in Paul's epistle to the Colossians.
2. The ten mentioned are:
 - (1). Tychicus (4:7), a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord.
 - (2). Onesimus (4:9), a faithful and beloved brother, who is "one of you" (from Colossae; cf. 4:12).
 - (3). Aristarchus (4:10) Paul's "fellowprisoner"
 - (4). Marcus (4:10), sister's son to Barnabas (nephew of Barnabas)
 - (5). Jesus (4:11), which is called Justus, "of the circumcision" (Jewish)
 - (6). Epaphras (4:12), "a servant of Christ...always labouring fervently for you in prayers" (cf. 1:7)
 - (7). Luke (4:14), "the beloved physician," who traveled with Paul
 - (8). Demas (4:14)
 - (9). Nymphas (4:15) -- a church met in his house
 - (10). Archippus (4:17)
3. Some of these men are well-known. For example, Marcus (4:10; aka as Mark or John Mark or John) wrote the Gospel of Mark.
4. Luke, "the beloved physician" (4:14), wrote the Gospel of Luke.
5. Onesimus (4:9) is the slave who ran away from Philemon. The apostle Paul led him to Christ.
6. Warren Wiersbe has divided this passage this way:

I. PAUL'S TWO REPRESENTATIVES (4:7-9)

II. THE MEN WHO STAYED (4:10, 11, 14a)

III. THE MAN WHO PRAYED (4:12, 13)

IV. THE MAN WHO STRAYED (4:14)

V. FINAL GREETINGS (4:15-18)

I. PAUL'S TWO REPRESENTATIVES (4:7-9)

1. The two representatives are Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9).
2. The book of Acts says seven men accompanied Paul into Asia. One of the men was Tychicus (Acts 20:4).
3. Paul refers to Tychicus affectionately as "a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord" (Col. 4:7).
4. Tychicus was entrusted to deliver two important letters for Paul (Col. 4:7-9; Eph. 6:21).

5. Later on, Paul mentions possibly sending Tychicus to Titus, who was ministering on the island of Crete (Titus 3:12).
6. In Paul's last letter, he wrote, "And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus" (II Tim. 4:12).
7. The apostle Paul led Onesimus to Christ while in prison. Philemon 10 says, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." He is referred to as "a faithful and beloved brother" (4:9).
8. Onesimus' name means, "Profitable." Paul wrote to Philemon and said that in time past, Onesimus had been unprofitable to him, but now (after he was saved), he was "profitable to thee and to me" (Philemon 11).
9. Onesimus had been a runaway slave, but now Paul refers to him as "a faithful and beloved brother" (Col. 4:9). Now he was living up to his name "Profitable."

II. THE MEN WHO STAYED (4:10, 11, 14a)

1. Aristarchus (4:10) was Paul's "fellowprisoner." Aristarchus traveled with Paul, and was caught up in the riot at Ephesus. Acts 19:29 says, "And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre."
2. Acts 20:4 says Aristarchus, along with Tychicus (Col. 4:7), was one of the seven men who accompanied Paul into Asia. Timothy was also part of this group.
3. Marcus (4:10) was Barnabas' nephew, and is the author of the second Gospel. His mother's name was Mary, and there was a big prayer meeting at her house in Jerusalem.
4. Acts 12:12 says Peter "came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying."
5. John was his Jewish name, and Marcus is Latin.
7. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-5). However, he soon abandoned them and went home to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).
8. Because Mark had left them, Paul refused to take him on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-38).
9. This led to a split between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39-41).
10. However, Paul and Mark were later reconciled. In II Timothy 4:11, Paul wrote, "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee; he is profitable to me for the ministry."

6. Mark may have been led to Christ by Peter. In I Peter 5:13, Peter referred to Mark as his "son."
7. Jesus (4:11), was also called Justus. We know nothing about him, other than he is called a "fellow worker." Jesus was a popular name (Joshua) in Bible times. This Jesus probably changed it to Justus after he was saved because Jesus is a "name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9).
8. "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11).
9. Luke (4:14) traveled extensively with the apostle Paul, as we see in the book of Acts (Acts 16:10ff). He wrote the third Gospel.
10. Luke stayed with Paul right up to his death. Paul's last recorded words were, "Only Luke is with me" (II Tim. 4:11).

III. THE MAN WHO PRAYED (4:12, 13)

1. We are first introduced to Epaphras back in Colossians 1:7. Epaphras was the man who had founded the church at Colossae; and Paul says in Colossians 4:13 that "he hath a great zeal for you."
2. Epaphras is also mentioned in Philemon 23 -- "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus." Though a prisoner in Rome, Epaphras prayed for his brethren in Colossae (Col. 4:12).
3. Epaphras was a great man of prayer -- always labouring fervently in prayer (4:12). "Labouring fervently" means "striving."
4. "Epaphras holds the unique distinction among all the friends and coworkers of Paul of being the only one whom Paul explicitly commended for his intensive prayer ministry" (D. Edmond Hiebert).
5. Epaphras prayed -- "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (4:12). The word "perfect" in Scripture means, "mature, fully developed, full grown, brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing."
6. "Perfection" in Scripture never means "sinless perfection." It means, "to reach an intended end." The intended end for Christians is to be like the Lord Jesus. Romans 8:29 says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."
7. This is what Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."
8. This is our goal as Christians.

IV. THE MAN WHO STRAYED (4:14b).

1. In Philemon 24, Demas is referred to by Paul as a "fellow laborer."
2. But then in II Timothy 4:10, we read these sad words: "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica."

V. FINAL GREETINGS (4:15-18)

1. A church met in Nymphas' house (Col. 4:15b). This was common in the apostolic era, and still is today. In Romans 16:3-5, Paul wrote, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus...Likewise greet the church that is in their house."
2. And in I Corinthians 16:19, Paul wrote, "The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."
3. Separate church buildings were unknown before the third century.
4. Colossians 4:16 indicates the letter to the Colossians was to be "read also in the church of the Laodiceans." Furthermore, the Christians in the church at Colossae were to "read the epistle from Laodicea."
5. We know nothing about this "epistle from Laodicea." There are two views:
 - The epistle has been lost, and God has chosen not to include it as part of the canon of Scripture.
 - The "epistle from Laodicea" refers to the epistle to the Ephesians.
6. Archippus (4:17) was called by God into the ministry. This verse was given to me by one of the preachers at my ordination council (as part of his charge).
7. Archippus is mentioned in Philemon 2. He may have been the son of Philemon.
8. Paul concludes with his usual "Grace be with you. Amen" (4:18).

CONCLUSION:

1. Most of the men mentioned here in this epistle are not well known. And yet they left behind an excellent testimony.
2. All except Demas. The name of Demas has a lasting stigma attached to it because of his tragic failure.
3. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (II Tim. 4:10).

4. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and his fellow pilgrim Hopeful, meet up with a man who has discovered a silver mine. This man tries unsuccessfully to lure Christian and Hopeful off their pilgrim pathway.
5. He tries to get them to seek after riches and pleasures of this life, rather than the unsearchable riches of Christ.
6. John Bunyan called this man "Demas."