

# NO SELF-SUFFICIENT CHRISTIANS

COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

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# No Self-Sufficient Christians

Colossians 4:7-18

Here we are at the last section of Colossians. In almost all of Paul's letters, he mentions several individuals that he wants to thank. Sometimes I think we get our culture mixed up with Christianity. For example, we Americans are taught to be self-sufficient and to ask for help is a sign of weakness. We have made the rugged individualist the hero to model ourselves after. However, biblical Christianity is exactly the opposite. The health of a Christian body is dependent upon people being willing and open to both give and receive help and gifts. Jesus modeled this nicely. He fed the 5,000 but He also asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Jesus was the bread of life, but graciously accepted dinner invitations.

No to be sure, there are times when we should be independent. Let me give you an example. At a wedding, the minister asked the nervous young groom, "Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?" This was met by a long silence. Finally the minister prompted the young man by loudly whispering, "I do." The groom quickly responded, "I do too."

This is probably a case in which we should independently take responsibility to answer and live up to that question. However, the nature of Christianity has to be interdependence. In other words, someone should not constantly be receiving without giving. And someone should not be giving without every receiving.

It seems strange that the ending to a book we study for doctrine and theology ends with personal greetings to individuals. However, we have to keep in mind that much of the New Testament is composed of letters to churches and individuals. And letters almost always carry personal greetings. And secondly, the Bible says:

*"<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup>It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do" (II Timothy 3:16-17 / NLT).*

Did you catch that? ALL Scripture is inspired by God. That means that there are things we need to learn even from these personal greetings. The main idea of this morning's text is this.

**AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES US TO BE INTERDEPENDENT: NOT INDEPENDENT NOT CODEPENDENT.**

Authentic Christianity really is difficult to live. It often requires careful balancing acts. If a person is constantly taking and receiving from the church body without ever giving or helping, they can easily become a drain on the community. On the other hand if a person is constantly giving and never willing to receive, they take away the dignity of those around them. They set themselves above everybody else. Living authentic Christianity requires us to be both cheerful givers and gracious receivers.

## I. ALL KINDS OF COWORKERS (VS 7-11)

### ***We Are Dependent On People To Cooperate In The Mission Of The Church.***

In verses 7-11, Paul demonstrates that we need all kinds of coworkers. In other words, for a church to be effective, **WE ARE DEPENDENT ON PEOPLE TO COOPERATE IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.**

#### **A. FELLOW SERVANTS (7-9)**

In verses 7-9, we are introduced to Paul's fellow servants. We are first introduced to Tychicus. We find out here that he is the one charged with delivering this letter. From other letters of Paul,

we learn that he has also delivered letters to Ephesus, and perhaps Laodicea. So he truly is valuable in the ministry chain. Paul could have written the most beautiful and powerful letter possible to this church in Colosse. However, if there was no one willing to make the long journey to hand-deliver it, the letter would be totally useless. Keep this in mind: there are no unimportant jobs or meaningless tasks in God's kingdom.

Think about this with me for a moment. Because I'm up here preaching, some may think I'm the most important part of this ministry. However, just think about all the coworkers necessary to pull this off. A group of faithful Japanese founded this church. People have financially supported this church throughout the years. The worship team leads the singing and praying. People have had to come in and clean the church. The sound people make sure you can hear me. Someone tapes the message and someone puts it on our church website so people at home can listen to the sermon. I am up here preaching, but it takes a whole bunch of faithful coworkers to make it happen. You may never see them, but they must all do their work for me to effectively preach here.

Tychicus not only delivered the letter, he was sent to minister to the Colossian church. He went to bring them news about Paul, how the imprisonment was going, how he was tolerating it, and what the projected outcome may be. He was sent to encourage the hearts of the Colossians. One of Paul's themes is that we are to always learn to live above our circumstances. Circumstances should never be the determining factor in our joy and contentment. We are to pray in all circumstances. We are to rejoice in all circumstances. We are to trust God in all circumstances.

Paul refers to Tychicus as a dearly beloved brother. In other words, Tychicus is a believer. And because of his love and dedication, he is a faithful minister. The word used to describe him is *diakonos*. In other words, he is a deacon, one who has dedicated himself to serving God and the church.

But look at the description Paul gives of him in the last phrase of verse 7. He is a fellow servant in the Lord. The word in Greek for fellow servant is a compound word. The word is *sundulos*. Literally it means together slave. Paul is in jail. However, he is not a slave or a captive of the Roman government. Paul and Tychicus are slaves to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they are sold out to accomplishing all that God has given them to do. In this case, Paul writes the letter of instruction to the Colossian church, and Tychicus will deliver it. Look at the last phrase in verse 8. As a slave for Jesus Christ, Tychicus is sent to encourage the hearts of the Colossians. The word for encourage is *parakaleo*. For those of you have done some extra Bible study, you will recognize the connection of this word to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Paraclete. He is the One Who is called to journey alongside of us. Tychicus is going to minister through the power of the Holy Spirit. The only true encouragement any of us can receive is bible based truth and encouragement.

Look at verse 9. Paul's use of the word fellow-slave to describe himself and Tychicus, now gets really interesting. A guy named Onesimus is accompanying Tychicus to Colosse. If you were to read the book of Philemon, you would realize that Onesimus was in fact a run-away-slave who became converted to Christianity under Paul's ministry. In his letter to Onesimus' master, Paul makes a beautiful plea for them to be reconciled and to serve one another.

I want you to think about the difficulty for slaves and masters who were converted to Christianity. First of all, slaves then were not anything like modern day slavery. Slaves were often highly educated. Many were doctors, educators, accountants, etc. Let's say a slave became a Christian. Because of education and his or her dedication to God, they may become church leaders. Now let's say the slave's master becomes a Christian and joins the church in which their slave is a deacon or elder. At the church, the master would be required to submit to and obey his slave. The master would have to be humble enough to submit to the leadership of their slave. On the other hand, the slave would have to avoid the temptation to lord it over their master in church.

Back home, the master would have to be careful not to show special privileges to his Christian slave. What the master should do is treat all his slaves really well because one of his slaves is a Christian brother or sister. And the slave should not expect special privileges. In fact the

Christian slave should be a model worker to the other slaves of the household. Perhaps that is why Paul addressed slave/master relationships earlier in the letter.

Since Onesimus is returning to his hometown of Colosse, perhaps the New Testament letter Philemon was being delivered at the same time. It now didn't matter if Onesimus was still a slave and if his Christian master Philemon was his master. They were both fellow slaves of their Lord Jesus Christ. We must all keep this in mind. It doesn't matter if we find ourselves in leadership positions or if we do little jobs behind the scenes. We are all fellow-servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul earlier said in this letter that everything we do, we must do heartily to the glory of Jesus Christ.

## **B. FELLOW PRISONERS (10)**

Next we are introduced to fellow prisoners of Paul in verse 10. We learn from the book of Acts that Aristarchus was from Thessalonica. He was traveling with Paul when the riots in Ephesus took place. Aristarchus and Paul made it out alive. But now it seems as if Aristarchus has been arrested with Paul and is now in jail with him. The interesting thing about the accounts of the New Testament church and the early church is that they never complain about their plight. They seem happy to suffer for the cause of Christ. Physically, they were prisoners but spiritually they flew as free and as high as eagles.

That's kind of opposite of the modern day church. We are physically free to worship God, but we are enslaved to our own lusts, our pride, our desires, and our passions. The early church had nothing and yet they rejoiced. We have everything, but almost never experience joy.

Let me point out one more thing about this list. Here in verse 10 Paul says that Mark is with him and he acknowledges Mark as a legitimate and competent leader. What is remarkable about this is that years earlier, Paul refused to take Mark on a second missionary journey with him because Mark started with him on one journey, got discouraged, and went back home. Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance but Paul didn't want to. In fact, Paul and Barnabas got in such an argument over it, they split. Paul went on his journeys and Barnabas took Mark on his missionary journeys. Here is Paul's public recognition of Mark's success. Because of Barnabas' discipleship, Mark was able to become a success. In fact, he is thought to be the author of the Gospel of Mark.

The last guy mentioned in this section is Jesus whose Roman name was Justus. Jesus was a common Hebrew name. Literally it was Joshua which means that God saves. Keep this in mind as well. Paul is writing to a primarily Gentile city that Jewish legalists were trying to confuse. The Jewish legalists were trying to make Gentile converts to Christianity follow Jewish religious laws as well. They were in effect telling these Gentiles they had to become Jews in order to becoming Christians. One of the things they were pushing was that they had to be circumcised.

Paul goes out of his way to note that there are only these three Jewish Christians working together with him in Rome. The rest are all Gentile Christians. So this is kind of a subtle slam at the Judaizers.

Here is how I want to sum this verse. We are all prisoners of something or someone. If we choose to be enslaved to our lust, passion, desire, and pride, we will be truly unhappy. If we choose to be prisoners of Jesus Christ, we will be free and filled with joy.

## **C. FELLOW WORKERS (11)**

In verse 11 we find that Paul refers to these people as fellow workers. As we have said, the nature and mission of church is to work together. It must be a cooperative effort and in order to succeed people need to quit looking at the church as a building or an institution. The church is the body of believers all over the world under the headship of Jesus Christ. This is critical to understand. **WE ARE DEPENDENT ON PEOPLE TO COOPERATE IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.**

## II. ALL KINDS OF SURPRISES (VS 12-14)

### ***In Ministry, There Will Always Be People Who Pleasantly Surprise Us, And Others Who Turn Out To Be Bitter Disappointments.***

One of the things that make being a pastor so interesting is that we encounter all kinds of surprises along the way as we study through the names in verses 12-14. **IN MINISTRY, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE PEOPLE WHO PLEASANTLY SURPRISE US, AND OTHERS WHO TURN OUT TO BE BITTER DISAPPOINTMENTS.**

#### **A. AN UNLIKELY EVANGELIST (12-13)**

In verse 12-13, we run into an unlikely evangelist. Epaphras seems to now be in Rome, ministering to Paul. If you remember from chapter 1, Epaphras heard Paul preaching, became a Christian, and brought the Gospel back to Colosse. Through Epaphras' ministry, the Colossian church was formed. This was not a religiously trained man. He was a man who heard, understood, and received the Gospel. I don't know why we are so pathetic at evangelism. Shouldn't evangelism simply be our telling how Jesus is Lord of our lives in all circumstances? Christians have come to think of giving a testimony in the context of evangelism to tell about their conversion experience. I guess that's okay, but isn't God doing anything in our lives today? And that seems to me to be the problem.

Modern day Christians view Christianity as mere fire insurance. They want to trust Christ for salvation but don't want to have Christ telling them what's right and wrong. In other words, they want Jesus to be their Savior, but they in no way want Him to be Lord of their lives. Most people who call themselves Christians indeed are lord of their own lives and expect God to serve their needs, desires, wants, and lusts. But I think it is important as illustrated by most of the New Testament believers, that in order for Jesus to be our Savior, He must first be our Lord.

Let's continue with Epaphras' example. Even though he was from Colosse, and was never formally trained, we find him in Rome, ministering to Paul who is in prison. And look how Paul describes him. Epaphras is a servant of Jesus Christ. He agonizes in prayer for you. In other words, Epaphras knows the theological danger his home church is facing and he agonizes in prayer for them. That word translated wrestling in prayer is the same word used to describe Jesus' prayer in the garden.

He prays that they not be led astray by false teachers, false theology, and false prophets. He prays that they stand firm in the truth, acknowledge the truth, and live the truth. This leads to maturity and assurance of salvation. Let sum this up this way. If Jesus is not Lord of our life: then His not our Savior either. Let me put it this way. If we are not willing to hear the truth of Scripture and if we are not willing to submit to the truth and obey the truth, then there is absolutely no reason to think we are Christians. And if we are not Christians, then Jesus is neither our Lord nor our Savior. Those are frightening thoughts. But the beautiful surprise is that Epaphras happened to be at one of Paul's meetings. He heard the Gospel and surrendered his life to God. And God used him mightily. The trick to Christian ministry is simply to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He can do wonderful things in us and through us.

#### **B. AN UNLIKELY PROPHET (14a)**

We meet an unlikely prophet in the first half of verse 14. Sometimes I think that Christians think of prophecy as simply telling the future. But if you were to study through the entire Bible, you would find that most of prophecy has to do with speaking God's Word and holding people accountable to living according to God's Word. If we were to break down the ministries and gifts of the church into two categories, we could say that the Apostolic ministry was geared towards unbelievers. The word apostle means one who is sent on a mission. For the most part, we find the apostles evangelizing and planting churches.

The Prophetic ministry seems to be geared towards believers. Here we are introduced to the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Here we find out that Luke was a physician. Luke was a Gentile doctor. He gave up his comfort to follow God by journeying with Paul. God spoke His word through Luke by inspiring him to write Luke and Acts. Are we really open to being led by God, or are we only willing to follow Christ as long as it is convenient and comfortable? Luke was a pleasant surprise to the early church.

### **C. AN UNLIKELY DISAPPOINTMENT (14b)**

However, in the second half of verse 14, we run into an unlikely disappointment. We are introduced another one of Paul's inner circle, Demas. Demas seems to be a part of this group who has chosen to stay with Paul in jail in order to minister to him, minister to the church, and to follow Christ. Demas seems to have a passionate relationship with Jesus and a real love for and dedication to Paul. People looked up to Demas and he had become an influential voice in the church.

Let's look in on Demas a few years later. Here is what Paul writes about him to Timothy:

*<sup>v10</sup>Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica" (II Timothy 4:10a / NLT).*

The word for deserted me is much more emotional in the Greek. It is the same word used by Jesus on the cross when He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The picture is that Demas had abandoned Paul. He had utterly forsaken him. Everything they had between them no longer meant a thing. Think about this. Paul disciplined Demas. He no doubt invested a lot of time, energy, and emotion in Demas' growth as a Christian. Knowing Paul, he sacrificed a great deal in training up Demas. I'm sure that Paul believed that Demas had a great love and respect for him. I'm sure that Paul trusted Demas. And now, years later in jail, Paul felt the bitter disappointment in the abandonment of Demas. And what could cause Demas to abandon Paul like this? The Greek literally reads that Demas left Paul behind because this present age. In other words, perhaps Demas was tired of following Paul through the sacrifices it took to follow Christ. Paul had to make some very difficult and painful choices. Demas was not willing to submit to Paul's leadership and follow him through the sufferings and sacrifice it took to finish strong.

Here is what is always exciting and frightening all at the same time. Pastors never know who will turn out to be faithful. Mark started out very badly but in the end finished strong and became a pleasant surprise to Paul. On the other hand, Demas started out strong, but turned out to be a bitter failure and disappointment to Paul. I'm quite sure that most pastors have experienced both kinds of surprises in their ministries. It is simply a fact of being a pastor. **IN MINISTRY, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE PEOPLE WHO PLEASANTLY SURPRISE US, AND OTHERS WHO TURN OUT TO BE BITTER DISAPPOINTMENTS.**

## **III. ALL KINDS OF FINAL THOUGHTS (VS 15-18)**

### ***Christians Are Responsible To And For One Another.***

And in verses 15-18, Paul finishes with a flurry of all kinds of thoughts. But the common theme seems to be that **CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO AND FOR ONE ANOTHER.**

### **A. RESPONSIBILITY TO FELLOW BELIEVERS (15-16)**

Verses 15-16 remind us that we have a responsibility to fellow believers. One of the things that really discourages me about many modern day Christians is that first of all they think they are only responsible for their own individual lives and their own happiness. They have no concept that their sin and bad decisions affect everyone around them. Secondly, people only think they are responsible for their own individual local church. That is why I think it is so hard to interest

church people in social justice issues. But here we can see that the churches in Colosse and Laodicea were connected.

Paul sent one church a letter and expected them to pass it on to their sister churches. I just want to point out three quick things here. First, the early church met in homes. There were no formal programs. They were centered on the teachings of the Apostles. Secondly, the churches never looked at themselves as independent. They were interconnected with all Christian churches throughout the world.

Thirdly, if you look at verse 16 it appears that we are missing one letter that if found, would be one of our New Testament books. It seems as if this letter to the Laodiceans has been lost. But perhaps that's good for me. I have enough trouble obeying what's in the letters we do have.

## **B. RESPONSIBILITY TO FINISH STRONG (17)**

In addition to being responsible to other believers, verse 17 reminds us that we have to finish strong. We have already talked about Mark starting badly but finishing strong and how Demas started strong but finished poorly. Here Paul encourages Archippus to complete the work he has received from the Lord. In order to claim we are Christian, we must finish strong and not quit. I know we use these verses to prove salvation by grace through faith, but please here the whole phrase:

*"<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10 / NIV).*

We were saved by God and equipped by God to complete all the good works that He prepared in advance for us to do. The Christian life is a walk in which we look for the good works God is calling us to do. Those are not the works we are choosing nor are they the places we want to go. We must finish strong.

## **C. RESPONSIBILITY TO REMEMBER (18)**

And in verse 18 we are responsible to remember those who are laboring on our behalf. Paul personally picks up the pen and signs his letter. He constantly asks for prayer. I know that reason I have stayed out of trouble during all my years of ministry is that godly people have constantly prayed for me. I know many of you here have prayed for me throughout the years and continue to pray for me. Thank you. Listen the bottom line of this section is this.

**CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO AND FOR ONE ANOTHER.**

## **IV. EPILOGUE**

What a fitting way for Paul to end this letter to the Colossians. Really it is important for us to keep in mind that **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES US TO BE INTERDEPENDENT: NOT INDEPENDENT NOT CODEPENDENT.**

I'd like to end our study of the book of Colossians by simply quoting some of Maxie Dunnam's thoughts as he closes his commentary:

*"Clarence Forsburg tells a story about what it means to be a part of a team. It is a story of Al McGuire and Butch Lee. McGuire was a great basketball coach, who retired from Marquette after winning the NCAA tournament in 1976. Butch Lee was a kind of prima donna player on that team. The story is about McGuire trying to teach Butch Lee about team basketball. This was the coach's word, 'Note, Butch, the game is forty minutes long, and if you divide that between the two teams that means there is twenty minutes when one team will have the ball and there's twenty minutes when the other team will have the ball. There are five players on each side. That means each player will have the ball for about four*

*minutes. Now, Butch, I know what you can do with a ball in four minutes. What I want you to show me, is what you can do for the other thirty-six minutes.'*

There is more than one lesson here and it goes beyond basketball to the whole of life. What do you do when someone else has the ball? When someone else is in the limelight? When you are the supporting member, not star of the game?

In his play 'The Cocktail Party,' T.S. Eliot spoke to these questions:

*'Half the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't mean to do harm, but the harm does not interest them, or they do not see it, or they justify it because they are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves.'* That is the problem – the endless struggle to think well of ourselves, the absorbing quest for significance. Paul's final greeting to the Colossians speaks to this struggle and quest; it also addresses the question about what we do when someone else has the ball."

I never forget what it takes for me to get up and preach a sermon every week. Let me finish Maxi Dunnam's quote as it echoes my sentiment as well:

*"So it is well that we pause now and then to celebrate the support cast. It is possible for the main character to come through with impact at center stage only if the backup crew are performing well."*