
Colossians 4:7-18 *Ones Faithful Service to Christ!*

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Be a person who loves and serves, one who exhibits appreciation and faith and desires to do what it takes to put it in action. Our real service comes from realizing who we are in Christ and allowing our devotion to translate into application. What God wants is for us to do and move our faith—to go beyond the mindset of “I have my salvation and thus, I need to do nothing more.” This is actually true; we cannot buy more favor or work for our salvation, but we can, as these people exhibited, be faithful and devoted. Exercise your faith and take advantage of your opportunities to grow and promote Christ’s Message. Faithfulness and helping one another by service and collective action is what matters to God. The more we put into our faith and come together, the more we are used to get the Gospel out. This is also about encouragement and service; it is contagious and mutually shows one another our faith while it is also displayed to those who do not know Christ. Paul and his fellow companions and coworkers, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Barnabas, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, and Archippus demonstrated what it means to be mobilized to serve and sacrifice. Not only did they contribute to Paul’s ministry, but they are immortalized in our Bible and in Heaven too. Our service also reflects into eternity, touching others and our Lord too!

This passage is all about faithfulness, which is what makes a person attractive to God and others. People with friends are also persons who are friend-makers because they listen and show appreciation and are not consumed with personal issues and hurts. Being grateful while being a greeter is also what builds and grows a church. It is about leaders being faithful and members being loving and hospitable. It shows our Lord’s love and makes a church a place people want to be a part of. Our faithfulness, along with the Holy Spirit’s empowerment and illumination, is what carries on the work of our Lord, demonstrates His love, and shows that His message is working so others will want to be a part of it.

Contexts and Background:

This passage is about Paul’s last reflections and instructions to this fledgling church. Then, he issues a series of blessings and endorsements on the people who helped him. It is a testament to the importance of influence, mobilization, faith in action, and being kind and good people who get excited and joyful about their task and call. If someone in leadership has all the gifts and abilities except the ability to get it across to others, then he is pretty much ineffective and in the wrong position. The list of names in this passage shows us the importance of mentoring and working through one another as ministers or in ministry. This is about being utilized and taught, willing to grow from our relationships and network so they are utilized and flowing, especially with God. Then we can be used to energize and complement one another. We can collectively be used with the gifts and abilities to strive to the fullest to the Glory of God and persevere with the Gospel.

Consider that these Colossians were seeking the favor of angelic beings and ignoring Christ, thinking this was a better, faster track to a spiritual life. It was Christ who bore our sins and redeemed us; why seek favor from an alternative that did nothing? The answer is that faith is a free gift, but we must practice in due diligence to build and mature it. Thus they (and we) had to learn what to put off and what to put on.

Paul was an extreme example of multiplying networks and energizing and influencing people for the Lord. Being excited about who you are in Christ is an essential aspect of attracting people and motivating them for and in leadership. New Christians bring in most of the new converts because they are excited and are energized. Even though new Christians may be ignorant on theological and apologetical matters, they are bringing people in versus people who have been Christians for many years but tend to lose their excitement and, thus, may rarely bring people into the church.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Tychicus*. He was from the west coast of Asia Minor and worked with Paul. He carried this and other letters from Paul to churches such as Ephesians and Philemon around 60-61 A.D. He was a trusted coworker and envoy. This is also a key fact to show that Paul wrote this letter (Acts 19; 20:4; 21: 27-36; 28:30; Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7, 16; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12; Philem. 1, 9, 23-24).
- *Onesimus*. Was a slave of Philemon's who sought Paul's help to become free. Paul did something even greater; he brought him and Philemon forgiveness and reconciliation as well as human rights and showed them the importance of Christian unity and brotherhood, which is what that Epistle is about. Thus, Paul instructs this church to welcome Onesimus as a brother, even though he was an escaped slave! An "Onesimus" eventually becomes a bishop of Ephesus, this region in the early second century, but it is not certain that this is the same person.
- *Aristarchus* was a Jew from Thessalonica, a republic of Macedonia, and also worked with Paul in Greece and Ephesus, as he accompanied Paul on his trips and to Rome where he was imprisoned with him (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2).
- *Mark*. The human author and/or secretary for the Gospel of Mark, that Paul and perhaps another Apostle supplied that information to, was a cousin of Barnabas, the great disciple maker. Paul had a rocky relationship with him and Barnabas earlier, all of them going their separate ways for several years; but, now the rift is healed and they are working together powerfully. The example is of the power of reconciliation and allowing the Peace of Christ to reign, which requires us to set aside our pride for the Gospel and for unity in the Church (Acts 13:13; 15:37-40; 2 Tim. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phm. 24; Col. 1:20-22; 3:15; Philem. 24).
- *Jesus called Justus*. This was a very common Jewish name like "John" is today. Unfortunately, the details of his life are lost to history. Obviously, he was associated with this church or the people in it, was a close companion to Paul, and was a person who allowed himself to grow in Christ and be used.
- *Comfort*. This means taking mere encouragement and putting into action. Not just saying to someone to do well, but helping them do it.
- *Epaphras*. Perhaps he was the church planter for this church who helped these Colossians embrace the new life and Way, and got in touch with Paul, who wrote this Epistle to straighten them out.
- *Wrestling/struggling/laboring fervently in prayer*. Meaning to agonize, as in doing and going beyond our best in labor or in an athletic competition, applying extreme exertion and effort. A model of that discipline and consistency is paramount; we too need to practice to become more mature and faithful (Col. 1:29).
- *Working hard/great zeal*. Means our faith must be of great value to us. Christianity is not to be a spectator sport; it must be engaged with our best means for God's glory for all things in our lives, school, work, family, ministry, and relating to strangers. It must all glorify our Lord!
- *Hierapolis*. One of the three larger cities in Asia Minor, formerly a wealthy, commercial, and medical center that sat on top of the then famous Pamukkale hot springs. It is now south-western Turkey, perhaps where Luke was educated as a medical doctor. It was a less than a day's walk away, around 6 miles from Laodicea and 14 miles from Colosse. The name means "sacred city," and was believed then to have been founded by the Greek god, Apollo.
- *Luke*. He was a highly educated and master-literate Physician and historian who penned the Gospel of Luke and chronicled Paul's life in the book of Acts. It is interesting to note that in Rome, a doctor was a

low-class profession and many were slaves. Luke may have been a slave that was sent on to higher learning by some means. He was a trusted companion, often coming with Paul on his missionary journeys and helping him during his imprisonment (Acts 16:10; 28).

- *Demas* was a foreign name, neither Jewish nor Greek, but he was a trusted Christian worker who later has a falling out and deserts Paul; this shows us an example of not allowing reconciliation to take place (2 Tim. 4:10)).
- *Nympha and the church in her house*. She was a woman who led—even may have co-pastored or hosted a church in Laodicea. In the early church, there was more of a partnership in leadership, with women often serving as leaders. Most churches then met for worship and instruction in homes or public halls or in some friendly Synagogues. Church buildings did not occur until Christianity became legal, nearly three hundred years later (Acts 12:12-13; 16:13-15; Rom. 16:1-6, 12-13; 1 Cor. 14:33-35; 16:19; Eph. 5:22-33; Philp. 4:2-3; Philem. 2; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; 2 John 1-5).
- *Church*. This is the “members of one body” from chapter three. The closer we are to Christ, the closer we are to one another and to what Christ has called us to do and be. Once we make real peace with God, we will be able to make and maintain peace with others. In context, this means believers need to practice unity and peace among one another as a display of how God brings peace to all of us. If we fight and are in disunity, “how can God be of peace” will be the objection from those who do not know Him (whom we are called to reach) or are new to the faith. Paul experienced strife and then reconciliation—a model for us all (Rom. 12:4; Eph. 3:6; 4:24-26; Col. 3:15).
- *Letter from Laodicea*. This was either the Epistle to the Ephesians, a copy of Romans, or both that went to the Laodiceans as well as Philemon. Ephesians, Romans, and perhaps this letter too were “encyclical,” as in circular letters that were copied and went out to more than one recipient, mostly in Asia Minor. Philemon was a personal letter to one person and it was read aloud because of the situation that needed to be settled in front of the entire assembly regarding a mutual brother (Eph. 1:1).
- *After this letter has been read to you*. Most people in the early church were illiterate; so, it was customary to read the letters of the Apostles as well as a Gospel aloud to the worshippers.
- *In my own hand*. Paul closes with greetings and prayer and the challenge for all to continue and complete the ministry. While Paul was in prison, he practiced the custom of dignitaries dictating their letters. This personal signature showed his concern and care and also showed the genuineness of the letter (Rom. 16:22; 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Do you realize that when we devote ourselves more to Christ, we have more opportunities in life and ministry? Why would any Christian not want that? The call is simple and the action to accept the call to be devoted to Christ as Lord is a simple endeavor. To have a mindset that our relationship with Christ must be persevering, our will needs to be open to be shaped and formed by Him! Yet, this can be very difficult for most Christians! First we are to be in prayer, in direct communication to Christ. And when we engage in prayer or any action regarding our Lord (and that would be all things in life), we are to be alert with our minds. We are also to be grateful, to have a thankful attitude and composure that helps us be mobilized for the faith. When we have these right attitudes, then we will have the right aptitude. With a heart and mind shaped by Christ, we can remember others, and keep them in prayer with specific requests. Then, we will see the opportunities that He brings us and be able and willing to proclaim His message of grace to those around us in a good attitude and lifestyle. As Saint Francis said, “If you need to, even use words.” We can place ourselves in situations where God will use us to impact others. The key is to remain in Him and not allow the world and its evil desires influence us; rather, we must be the influencers to them!

The principles of the Gospel must impact us so we are influenced and energized by it. If the leader is not excited, the message will drop off and fall flat. The learner and hearer will not desire something irrelevant and unexciting. If they see no excitement in the leader, why would they want to be a part of it? The nature of the Christian life is the joy and excitement of being in Christ over all else, and this should be the biggest motivation so the excitement the leader receives from his growth becomes contagious to those around him; this is *influence*. Being in Christ means living our lives for Him with excitement in all times and all places. This is *influence*.

Holy living is not forced upon us. We are not adhering to a religion, but a relationship with our Lord! Holy living comes from a life that is transformed and renewed by what Christ has done for us! We can't mature in the faith by punishing ourselves, or seeking mystic or special revelations; rather it is knowing, trusting, and obeying Christ as LORD, realizing Who He is and what He has done for us and then responding in gratitude, trust, and obedience. The Colossians had a skewed idea of God's purity and our sinful nature; they had it half right, that God is pure and we are sin. However, the application that *we can do as we please since we are in Christ* is purely wrong. This now becomes a form of *relativism*. Such thinking and behavior equates a life that is meaningless and produces little to no fruit.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Who are the people who helped you grow in the faith? How and why was their influence special and needed? How can you do this for others?
2. How can you be kinder in your actions and words? How can your gratitude allow you to be more gracious?
3. How do you see the people in this passage exhibiting faithfulness and devotion? How can this encourage you? Do any of these people inspire you? How so?
4. What have you done to exercise your faith and take advantage of opportunities to grow and promote Christ's Message?
5. How does it make you feel that the more we put forth faith and come together, the more the Gospel gets out and the more we are used? What gets in the way?
6. How would you define "faithfulness?" How does this make a person attractive to God and others? How is this important to growing a faith and a church? How does this carry on the work of our Lord?
7. What would demonstrate to you Christ's love and show you His Message? How about before you became a Christian?

8. What must happen in your life (assuming you are a Christian) for a deeper and more radical transformation? Look back on your life, comparing how you once were with how you are living in Him now. Has there been progress? If not, what must you do?
9. The total life transformation that Christ gives us will not only change us from the inside out, but will allow us to be an impact on others for the Kingdom. How does this help encourage you?
10. How can you be challenged more to continue and complete the ministry Christ has given you? How does the fact that Paul experienced strife and then was able to move to reconciliation establish a model for you?
11. How can you be a person who loves and serves, one who exhibits appreciation and faith and desires to do what it takes to put it in action?
12. What do you think God wants you to do to move your faith forward? What do you need to do to go beyond the mindsets that hold you back? Remember: faith is not blind or reckless.