

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

The Apostle Paul's People Power

Colossians 4:7–18

We will get to **Colossians** in just a moment but first let me share with you where we are traveling next as a church. Next week, our very own Pastor Intern, Mitch Palermo, will begin a short series through the book of **Philemon**. **Philemon** follows naturally on the heels of **Colossians**. That series starts next week. Make sure that you are here for that.

Also, in the month of September, I'll begin a new series in the OT book of **Song of Solomon**. You've been warned. That series will be a verse-by-verse series, as is our wont here at Messiah Bible Church. Stay tuned for more details and timing on that.

But for today, let's take our Bibles together and turn, one final time, to the book of **Colossians**.

One of my favorite cinematic moments of all time is in the movie, "The Lord of the Rings"—the first movie, "The Fellowship of the Ring." In that movie, there's a moment when this great team of individuals gathers at Rivendell to embark on a quest. They have this powerful and evil ring that must be destroyed.

So they cobble together this diverse and awkward group of nine people to travel to Mordor to destroy the ring. You have an elf named Legolas. You have a wizard named Gandalf. You have a dwarf named Gimli (and dwarves hate elves by the way). You have two men: Strider and Boromir. And then you have four hobbits: Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin. And this group covenants together for a common purpose. They set aside their differences for a shared objective—to destroy this evil ring in the fires of Mordor.

Well, similarly, at the end of the book of **Colossians**, Paul mentions ten people by name who are actively serving in the mission. **John MacArthur** calls this a verbal group photograph.¹ You have Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, and Archippus.

Three of the people mentioned are Jewish. Seven of them are Gentiles. We have nine men and one woman. We have at least one slave named Onesimus. It's almost as if Paul is trying to represent in these final greetings what he said earlier in **Colossians 3:11**, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."

And by the way, this is not unusual for Paul. Paul often ends his letters with personal greetings. But the number of names mentioned in **Colossians** is exceeded by only one other of his letters—**Romans**. And the mentioning of these individuals is not a simple "say hello to my friends for me." **Paul is not name-dropping or passing out awards to his faithful disciples like it's the Oscars**. No, Paul's purpose in relaying this list of names is multifaceted. He's trying to do several things in these last few verses and reinforce several theological truths.

But we can make one overarching observation about Paul in this conclusion to this letter—Paul was a people person. And his mission of the gospel is a mission that concerns people. It isn't ultimately a mission of widgets and tasks with a to-do list. People are the mission. And people, as we'll see, are the missionaries.²

¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 190.

² Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 153: "For those of us who claim the name of Christ, there are two distinct courses of life available. One is to cultivate a small heart. It is by far the safest way to go because it minimizes the sorrows of life. If our ambition is

Today I want to give you seven statements about the Apostle Paul's people power. Paul's going to continue his work of ministry even from prison... with a little help from his friends.³

Write these down. Here's #1. The Apostle Paul's people power involves first of all...

1) The Power of **Collaboration** (4:7-9)

Paul says this in verse 7,

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved⁴ brother and faithful minister⁵ and fellow servant in the Lord.⁶

The question you might ask at this point is the following—how will Tychicus tell the Colossians all about Paul's activities? And when will he do that? The answer is that Tychicus will do that when he delivers the letter that Paul has addressed to them. In other words, Tychicus is Paul's courier.

Look at verse 8.

⁸ I have sent⁷ him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,^{8 9} and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.⁹ They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Now let me say a few things about Tychicus, and then I'll say a few things about Onesimus. Tychicus was more than just a trusted courier. Tychicus was a trusted helper and co-traveler with the Apostle Paul.¹⁰ If you remember from the book of Acts, Tychicus was from Asia (probably Ephesus). He travelled with Paul to Jerusalem with a gift for the church. He was one of the magnificent seven that traveled with Paul (**Acts 20:4**).

And Tychicus wasn't just tasked with delivering the letter to the **Colossians**. He was also tasked with delivering the letter to the **Ephesians (Eph 6:21)**, as well as the letter to Philemon (**Phm 9**).

Later Tychicus was mentioned in the book of **Titus** as a possible replacement for Titus in Crete.¹¹ And he was mentioned in **2 Timothy** as a replacement for Timothy so that Timothy could go visit the Apostle Paul

to avoid the troubles of life, the formula is simple: minimize entangling relationships, do not give yourself to people, carefully avoid elevated and noble ideals. If we will do this, we will escape a host of afflictions. Many people, even some who profess to be Christians, get through life with a minimum of tribulation by having small hearts... The other path is to cultivate a ministering heart like that of the Apostle Paul. Open yourself to others and you will become susceptible to an index of sorrows scarcely imaginable to a shriveled heart. Enlarge your heart and you will enlarge your potential for pain."

³ Surprisingly, the title of MacArthur's chapter on this passage is "With a Little Help From my Friends." This is a rare pop-culture reference in MacArthur's writings. The ethos of that statement is correct. MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 190: "God's leaders have always depended on others to support them in their work."

⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 309: "'Beloved' likely has God as the implied subject (cf. Rom 1:7), although Paul may also have in mind his own love for Tychicus (cf. Phil 4:1)."

⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 335: "Nowhere else in his letters does Paul describe a co-worker with the same threefold description that we find here—a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord—though Paul's commendation of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25 is similar: 'brother, co-worker and fellow soldier.'"

⁶ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 143: Paul rounded off his description with 'fellow servant in the Lord.' This term expressed an equality between Paul and Tychicus. It is almost as if Paul said, 'Don't think because I wrote the letter and Tychicus is delivering it that I am better than he. We are both servants of the same Lord, who has given us separate tasks. I'm not Tychicus's master, though he is serving me.'"

⁷ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 310: "Paul explains further the purpose of sending Tychicus to Colossae. 'I am sending' (ἐπεμψα) has rightly been recognized to be an epistolary aorist, that is, 'the use of the aorist indicative in the letters in which the author self-consciously describes his letter from the time frame of the audience.' In English, it is therefore appropriate to translate the phrase in the present tense. The use of this aorist also implies that Tychicus is officially the letter carrier designated by Paul."

⁸ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 310: "This verse is reproduced verbatim in Eph 6:22, thus referring to the same epistolary context."

⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 308: "The fact that the phrase 'who is one of you' is only applied to Onesimus probably means that Tychicus is not from the city of Colossae... The fact that Tychicus appears a number of times in relation to Ephesus suggests that he is from Ephesus and he is a convert of Paul's ministry there."

¹⁰ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 142: "Tychicus popped up at the end of Paul's missionary work in Ephesus, and since he was a native of the province of Asia (Acts 20:4), of which Ephesus was the major city, we think he was probably a convert of Paul's long ministry in Ephesus."

before he died.¹² All that to say this, Tychicus was a faithful understudy and mentee of the Apostle Paul, just like Timothy, just like Titus, just like so many others that Paul mentored and trained to continue the work after he was gone. This is the power of collaboration. This is the power of co-laborers. This is the power of **Ephesians 4:12** at work— “[equipping] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

For the record, Paul rarely worked alone. He always had friends working alongside of him. He usually had travel partners wherever he went.¹³ Paul knew, as we better know, that Christianity isn’t a solo sport and making disciples isn’t done in isolation. **Even the way Jesus framed it is in the plural. We don’t just live as a disciple. We make disciples. And we don’t make disciple. We make disciples.**

Warren Wiersbe said once, “In my own reading of Christian biography, I have discovered that the servants whom God has used the most were people who could make friends. They multiplied themselves in the lives of their friends and associates in the ministry. While there may be a place for the secluded saint who lives alone with God, it is my conviction that most of us need each other. We are sheep, and sheep flock together.”

And speaking of sheep, I do find it interesting that Paul mentions Onesimus here too. Onesimus travelled with Tychicus to deliver the letter of Colossians and the letter of Philemon. Onesimus is Philemon’s runaway slave, as we find out in the book of Philemon. And Paul describes Onesimus as our faithful and beloved brother. But he doesn’t describe him as a “faithful minister” like Tychicus. Why not? Probably because Onesimus is a new convert. Probably because Onesimus is a new believer whom Paul led to Christ. Probably because Onesimus needs to make things right with Philemon before he can begin a work.¹⁴

That’s all I want to say about that now. I’ll leave any further speculation to Mitch and his preaching next week.

Write this down as #2 in your notes. The Apostle Paul’s people power involves the power of collaboration. It also involves the power of co-sufferers.

2) The Power of **Co-sufferers** (4:10–11)

Paul says in **verse 10**,

¹⁰ *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you,*

Now don’t move past that verse too quickly. Aristarchus was one of the few people, along with Luke, who travelled with Paul to Jerusalem and then to Caesarea and then to Rome. And based on this verse, it seems as if Aristarchus is a prisoner with him. Maybe he’s been a prisoner all along the way.

And this isn’t the only time that Aristarchus was inconvenienced for the sake of the Apostle Paul. Aristarchus was in Ephesus when the mob tried to arrest Paul. And when they couldn’t find Paul, they seized Aristarchus instead (**Acts 19:29**).

Aristarchus was on the ship with Paul when he went to Rome. He was there with that ship was blown off course and when all the sailors thought they were going to die. He was there also when the ship made it to land

¹¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 192: “When Paul needed a temporary replacement for Titus as pastor of the church on Crete, Tychicus was one of the ones considered (Titus 3:12). Tychicus, who had begun as a messenger, was now a candidate to fill in for as great a man as Titus.”

¹² MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 192–3: “Because Timothy could not leave his congregation at Ephesus without a replacement, Paul sent Tychicus (2 Tim. 4:12). Once again, Tychicus’s name comes up as a replacement for one of Paul’s prominent associates. That speaks highly of his character.”

¹³ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 191: “Paul never ministered alone. He shared his first leadership opportunity in the church at Antioch with four other men, and throughout the following years of his missionary travels, he always had companions. The only time we find him alone in Acts is for a brief period in Athens (Acts 17). Although he is a prisoner as he writes Colossians, he still is not alone.”

¹⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 194: “Although Onesimus was a runaway slave, Paul describes him as our faithful and beloved brother. When a person comes to faith in Christ, the past is no longer an issue. ‘Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come’ (2 Cor. 5:17). Onesimus was a testimony to the power of God to transform a life. Paul tells the Colossians that the man who left Colossae as a runaway slave now returns as one of your number. He was to be treated as a member of the church, because in Christ there was neither slave nor freeman (Gal. 3:28).”

and all the soldiers decided to kill Paul and all the prisoners. He was there when Paul was bitten by a snake in Malta. It's as if this guy, Aristarchus, was specifically put on planet earth to suffer alongside of the Apostle Paul. If there was anyone who could turn to Paul and say, **"You know what, it's hard being your friend,"** it was Aristarchus.¹⁵

Aristarchus was also a Jew according to **verse 11**. So not only does Paul have a fellow prisoner with him, but he's also got a least one fellow Jewish sufferer in prison. He's a brother in the flesh, but he's also a brother in Christ.

And speaking of brothers in the flesh and brothers in Christ, Paul says,

¹⁰ *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions¹⁶—if he comes to you, welcome him),¹⁷*

Paul and Mark had a complicated history. John Mark was a deserter in Paul's first missionary journey. It's great to see here that those two have buried the hatchet. John Mark has learned how to suffer and follow Christ. Paul and Mark are now presumably working together and serving together in Rome.¹⁸ Paul says to the **Colossians**, **"If Mark comes to visit you, roll out the red carpet for him like you would for me. Pour out your hospitality on him."**

Also, **verse 11**,

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.*

In other words, these three guys—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus—are my only Jewish brothers in Christ working alongside me for the kingdom of God. **In other words, if Paul were Frodo, these three guys are his Merry, Pippin, and Samwise Gamgee.** I'm sure you can imagine, as a Jew, swimming in a sea of Gentiles, in Rome, this would be particularly comforting to the Apostle Paul.

And to that you might ask, "Where's Barnabas?" Probably dead. "Where's Silas?" Probably dead. Where are Jesus's apostles? Many of them are dead by now or will be dead soon. Peter and John are still alive, but their work doesn't intersect with Paul at this point. Only John really lives a long life in the Roman Empire. Now you know why Paul said earlier, "make the best use of the time." **Why? Because time is short.**

Write this down as #3 in your notes.

3) The Power of **Intercession** (4:12–14)

Paul says in **verse 12**,

¹² *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you,*

So, Paul mentions the Jews who are alongside of him in Rome first, and now he's mentioning the Gentiles. Why does he do it in that sequence? I don't know. To the Jew first, and then the Gentile?

I don't know if sequence matters as much here as the show of diversity. Paul is working with both Jews and Gentiles. He's laboring for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. He loves and he serves both Jews and Gentiles.

And speaking of Gentiles, Epaphras was especially strategic in the work of reaching Gentiles in the area around Colossae. Paul said earlier in **1:7–8**, **"Just as you learned it [the gospel] from Epaphras our beloved**

¹⁵ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 194: "It is unlikely that Aristarchus was actually a prisoner; Paul refers to him as such because he shared Paul's prison existence. That he chose to make Paul's lifestyle his own speaks of his sympathetic, caring heart. He gave up his own freedom to minister to Paul's needs. Any leader would be enriched to have a faithful Aristarchus at his side through all his trials."

¹⁶ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 313: "Since Paul has never been to Colossae, and since there is no evidence that he had prior contact with that church, most likely someone else gave the instruction. Possible candidates include Peter (cf. 1 Pet 5:13) and Barnabas."

¹⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 333: "It is somewhat surprising that Paul makes no reference to his own travel plans in this section, since, according to Philemon 22, he apparently contemplates a visit to the city."

¹⁸ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 195: "In Philemon 24, Paul names him among his fellow workers. The man whom Paul once rejected became one of his greatest helpers. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul tells Timothy to 'pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.'"

fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.”

Epaphras, as I mentioned earlier, was probably responsible for starting the church in Colossae. He was probably also in leadership there. He went to the Apostle Paul in Rome. He was seeking help from him for how to strengthen the church and how to battle false teaching that had spread.

And for whatever reason, Paul doesn't send Epaphras back with this letter. I don't know why. I guess Epaphras still has some stuff to learn from Paul before he goes back. **He's like Luke Skywalker on the planet Dagobah with Yoda.** He's not ready to go back yet.

But that doesn't mean that Epaphras isn't active working on behalf of the church. Look at **verse 12**.

¹² *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling¹⁹ on your behalf in his prayers,*

By the way “struggling” in this verse is the Greek word ἀγωνίζομαι (*agōnizomai*). And it's related to the Greek word ἀγωνία (*agōnia*), which is used to describe Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as he prayed to God shortly before his crucifixion (see **Luke 22:44**). So Epaphras was engaged in Gethsemane-like prayer for the church in Colossae.

And what was he praying for? He was praying...

that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

God give us people who pray like this on behalf of this church!

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

It's quite possible that Epaphras played a part in planting the church in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well.²⁰ All three of these cities and all three of these churches are just a few miles apart. And so maybe Paul is training up Epaphras to be another kind of Timothy, a church-planter and leader who can continue the work in these communities or elsewhere. I don't know.

The important thing for us to take away from this passage is the following—Paul emphasizes again the importance of prayer for the local church. Epaphras was always struggling on behalf of the church in prayer. And Paul says, “He has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.” Worked hard how? Maybe through planting the church and serving as a leader there. But I'm not so sure this isn't another reference to the hard work that Epaphras is doing in prayer!

Again, God give us people who labor like this on behalf of this church!

Luke gives one final greeting from his entourage in Rome. Look at **verse 14**.

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

I don't have anything applicational for you here. But I do want to point out a few important historical details that we can derive from this verse. I'll give you three. First, this is one of only three places in the NT where Luke is mentioned by name (see also **2 Tim 4:11**; **Phm 24**). The gospel of **Luke**, and the book of **Acts**, are technically speaking anonymous. All we know is who the recipient of the book is—Theophilus. The author is never stated.

But I agree with church history, which confirms that the Luke from **Colossians 4:14** is the author of those books. And he is the person who periodically uses the term “we” in **Acts**. So, he was a co-traveler with Paul during many of missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire.

¹⁹ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 151: “From the Greek word used here we get our English word *agonize*. Paul had watched Epaphras pray for Colosse, and this was the one word which best described his prayer. The same root word was used to describe Jesus' fervent prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 344: “The translation ‘wrestling’ preserves the athletic connotations that the verb often has (see also ‘battling’ in NJB; ‘contending’ in HCSB). In any case, it refers to strenuous and consistent intervention with the Lord on behalf of the Colossians—prayer needed especially in light of the danger posed by the false teachers.”

²⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 347: “Epaphras was probably the founder of churches in all three cities, and this verse makes clear that he continued to exercise pastoral oversight of them.”

And this is the only place in the NT where we find out that Luke was a physician.²¹ Paul uses the word “beloved” too here, which is understandable. Luke was a good friend of his and a trusted partner in ministry. Perhaps too Luke was Paul’s personal physician. If anyone needed a traveling physician by his side, it was probably the Apostle Paul.

A third thing that we learn from this statement in **Colossians 4:14** is that Luke was a Gentile. This is inferred by the fact that Luke isn’t mentioned alongside the other Jewish men who are with Paul—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus. If that inference is correct, then here’s another inference—Luke is the only writer of Scripture of the OT or the NT who is not Jewish. So, the Bible that you hold in front of you, Christian... let’s just do the math. 64 of the 66 books of Scripture were written by Jews. Two of those books were written by a Gentile. That should be sobering to a room full of mostly Gentiles.

And speaking of Gentiles, and speaking of something applicational... I misspoke... I do have something applicational to extract from this passage. Paul says, **“Luke greets you... as does Demas.”** For those of you who know, you know... there is something foreboding in that mentioning of a man named Demas.

In **2 Timothy 4:10**, Paul says about Demas... this is several years after Paul wrote **Colossians**... this is his second stint in prison in Rome, not the first... **“For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.”**

In **Colossians 4**, during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, Demas was a faithful coworker of Paul’s. In **2 Timothy 4**, just a few years later Demas was a deserter and backstabber. Demas was to Paul what Judas was to Jesus.²² **And it’s a little reminder that the people that we serve with right now might not be the same people that we finish with in Christ.**

Should that prompt us to give up on people? Should that keep us from investing fully in relationships with others to fulfill the mission that Jesus gave us? No. Jesus had his Judas. Paul had his Demas. You will have your deserter and backstabber too. Stay after the mission. Don’t get blown offtrack. People will sometimes fail you; God never will.

Write this down as #4 in your notes. Let’s look at...

4) The Power of **Community** (4:15–16)

Paul says in verse 15,

¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

As I mentioned already, Laodicea was just a few miles from Colossae. So conceivably there was cross-pollination between the communities of faith. And that’s good. I do believe that God wants his local churches to be autonomous. I don’t think that a complicated hierarchy is good for the church. Churches need local elders. And local elders oversee the local church under Christ. The end. That’s my view. It’s pretty easy to argue that in the NT.

But just because churches are autonomous, it doesn’t mean they have to be alienated from other churches. That’s never how the NT presents it. And Paul seems to indicate here the goodness of having good relationships between churches.

Notice too that there is a woman who is hosting the church in her house. That’s amazing. This is like the Laodicean equivalent to Lydia in Philippi. Nympha—who is probably a Gentile convert in Laodicea—opened up her house for the church to meet. Good for her. She must have had the gift of hospitality.

Interestingly, in the ancient world, there was a common prayer that was prayed by Jewish men. Some variation of it is actually found in the Jewish Talmud. And the prayer went something like this... A Jewish man would wake up in the morning and get on his knees and say, “Thank you, God, for not

²¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 198: “Luke was the prototype of the medical missionary. Not everyone in the Lord’s service has to have a seminary degree. God’s work needs specialists too. Luke surrendered his special talent to God.”

²² MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 198: “Paul records the tragedy of Demas’s desertion in 2 Timothy 4:9–10: “‘Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.’ The pull of the world system eventually became irresistible to Demas, and he abandoned both Paul and the ministry. Jesus had His Judas, and Paul had his Demas. Anyone who has been in the ministry long enough has shared in that heartbreaking experience.”

making me a woman. Thank you, God, for not making me a slave. And thank you, God, for not making me a Gentile.”²³ Let me just say for the record, I doubt, *post-Damascus Road*, that Paul ever prayed that prayer.

In fact, Paul mentions a woman, a slave, and seven Gentiles in his conclusion to the book of **Colossians**. It’s almost as if he believes that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (**Gal 3:28**).

And notice the methodology of how Paul wants his letters circulated and read. Look at **verse 16**.

¹⁶ *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans;*²⁴

So, **“Tychicus, here’s what you do. You read this letter out loud in front of the entire church in Colossae. Or have someone else read it to the entire church.”**²⁵ **And then when you read it in Colossae, get thee to Laodicea and have it read there.”**²⁶

Why would Paul command this? Why would he want his letter read out loud in front of the entire church? Well, some people in this culture were illiterate, so having it read for them was especially important.²⁷

But I think the purpose is bigger than that. Paul wants the community of faith to prioritize the reading of his letter, which is imbued with apostolic power.²⁸ Paul, I believe, was quite conscious of this fact. In other words, he knew his letters had apostolic power.²⁹

I know for a fact that Peter was aware of this, because he called Paul’s letters Scripture (see **2 Peter 3:15–16**). He puts them on par with the OT Scriptures. That’s an amazing thing to do for a Jew like Peter.

All of that to say this—there is power in the read Word of God in the community of faith. There is power unleashed when the Scriptures are read, taught, and applied in the household of faith. **And we do that here in San Antonio, just like they did it in Colossae two thousand years ago.**³⁰

Now here’s a conundrum for us. Look at the end of **verse 16**...

*and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.*³¹

²³ This illustration is taken from J.D. Greear’s sermon “The Worldwide Movement,” 01-19-21: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HI7Kk8CTb30>. Greear also comments on how Paul evangelizes Philippi in Acts 16:11-40. The first three people that Paul (a Jewish man) evangelizes in that community are a woman (Lydia), a slave (the nameless slave girl who was healed of demon possession) and a Gentile (the jailer).

²⁴ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 158: “We know that in the future Laodicea would need all the help it could get, as it became a church that was neither hot nor cold and was rejected by Christ (Revelation 3:14–22).”

²⁵ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 144: “The Colossian church now seems a failure. Today if you travel to the Lycus Valley, you will find only a few stones and some poor farmers. But in that day the church flourished, and its life spread contagiously around the world with the blessed truths of the supremacy of Christ. The Church now is far richer because of Colosse and Paul and his fellow servant Tychicus.”

²⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 350: “It implies that this particular letter, at least, was not narrowly occasional, as if it had relevance only to the Christians in Colossae.”

²⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 350: “In a culture in which copies of texts were not easily come by and in which not all people were literate, the public reading of a letter sent to a community such as the church at Colossae would be the normal procedure.”

²⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 350: “See, most clearly in the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians 5:27: ‘I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.’”

²⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 304: “While Colossians as a document must be read in its literary and historical contexts, its relevance is not limited to the believers in first-century Colossae. Moreover, the circulation of letters may point to the impetus for the later collection of Paul’s letters.”

³⁰ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 303–4: “This letter, as other Pauline letters, are liturgical acts that are not simply concerned with the social-historical reality of the community, but they are also concerned with allowing the recipients to act and respond in light of the spiritual reality as impressed on them throughout the letter.”

³¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 350–1: “The phrase ‘from Laodicea’ will almost certainly not mean a letter written by the Laodiceans but a letter addressed to the Laodiceans, which is now in their possession and hence is ‘from’ them in the sense that it will be sent from them to Colossae.”

Huh? What's the letter from Laodicea? Where's that letter in the Bible? What happened to that letter? Was this a letter from Paul to Laodicea? Was this a letter from the Laodiceans to the Colossians?

Here's the answer for you—we don't know. This statement is soaked in mystery. And people have speculated for hundreds of years what letter Paul is referencing here. Some people think this is a reference to the book of **Ephesians**.³² Some people think it's a lost Pauline Scripture. I'm inclined to think that it is a lost letter from Paul, but one that wasn't Scripture per se, because I don't know why God would have Paul write Scripture, and then not preserve it for us.³³

So, the debate rages on. Let's not conclude too much from this bare text. Someday in eternity we'll find out for sure. But if anyone comes to you and says, **"We've found a lost letter from the Apostle Paul,"** let me just say for the record, I'll be dubious.

Here's something that is a little more practical for us. Write this down as #5 in your notes.

5) The Power of **Perseverance** (4:17)

I'll just call this the power of perseverance. Or maybe you might call this Paul's power of persuasion.

Paul says in **verse 17**,

¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

Again, there is mystery here. Who is Archippus? What's his ministry? We don't know. Paul calls Archippus a fellow soldier in **Philemon 2**. Perhaps he was the pastor of one of these churches—Colossae, Laodicea, or Hierapolis. Or perhaps he was a person who had a spiritual gift that he wasn't using—the gift of teaching, the gift of serving, the gift of hospitality, the gift of evangelism. We don't know. And we won't know until we get to eternity.

Nevertheless, let me leverage the power of Paul's statement here with some exhortational force right now. **"You are Archippus, Christian! You are Archippus." Fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.**³⁴ **If your ministry is teaching... teach. If your ministry is helps... help. If your ministry is evangelism... evangelize. If your ministry is hospitality... be hospitable. Fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.**

Be a Archippus, don't be a Demas. Persevere in your service of the Lord.

Final verse. Write this down as #6 in your notes. Let's look at...

6) The Power of **Remembrance** (4:18)

Paul says in **verse 18**,

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

"Give me that papyrus sheet, Timothy. I'm writing this with my own hand!"

This was pretty common in that day.³⁵ Paul, as an old man, probably had bad handwriting and bad eyesight at this time. Paul calls himself an "old man" in **Philemon 9**, so I'm not saying anything that he doesn't say himself.

He probably had the shakes after all the punishment his body had taken over the years. So Paul used what's called an amanuensis. He would dictate letters, and someone like the young Timothy would write it out

³² MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 199: "In all likelihood, however, Paul here refers to the book of Ephesians. The oldest manuscripts of Ephesians do not contain the words 'in Ephesus' in Ephesians 1:1, indicating that it was a circular letter intended for several churches. Tychicus probably delivered Ephesians to the Laodiceans, so Paul commands the Colossians and Laodiceans to exchange letters."

³³ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 351: "It is unlikely, then, that the 'letter to the Laodiceans' can be identified with any extant Pauline letter; it has been lost to us."

³⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 199: "To fulfill our ministry is what the Lord expects of all of us."

³⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 353: "The practice of adding a brief note in the author's own hand to authenticate the letter is known from the Greco-Roman world generally and is done by Paul also in 1 Corinthians (16:21), Galatians (6:11), and 2 Thessalonians (3:17) (Philemon also has a signature [v. 19], but it functions slightly differently.)"

for him... someone with good penmanship who could write neatly and economically because papyrus was rare and expensive in that day.

But in order to certify that this letter was actually his, **Paul puts down his John Hancock at the end.** And then, he gives this command. It's the last imperative in the book of **Colossians**. What is it? Remember! *Remember my chains.*

Remember the suffering that I've endured for the gospel. Remember the suffering that your forebears went through to get the gospel to you. Remember that suffering is part of life on this side of eternity.³⁶

I don't remember who said it first, but there's a great expression in the Christian life that I think we should embrace. It goes like this: "We stand on the shoulders of giants." In other words, we are able to see farther and do more and enjoy the goodness of the vista because of those who have gone before us and in some case suffered greatly.

That was true of the Apostle Paul. That was true of all of Jesus's Apostles in the first century. As most of you know, most of those Apostles suffered and died horrible deaths. The church father Tertullian said it best, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Remember my chains.

They remember. We remember.

And finally, #7 in your notes. Paul leverages one final time...

7) The Power of **Grace** (4:18b)

Paul says in verse 18,

Grace be with you.

Paul began this letter to the Colossians with an amazing statement about God's grace: **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father" (Col 1:2).**³⁷ In quintessential Pauline fashion, Paul ends this letter with a reference to grace.³⁸ **Because Paul knows, like we know, that everything we have in terms of life and blessing and salvation is strictly a result of God's sheer grace. John 1:16 says,** "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

And so, Paul says... Paul closes out this great book with a statement...

Grace be with you.

Grace be with you, Colossian believers. And grace be with you, Messiah Bible Church.

Grace be with you.

Thus ends the book of Colossians.

³⁶ CHRYSOSTOM: "Hear Paul's chains, and you will understand that to be in affliction is no proof of being forsaken." Quoted in Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 57.

³⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 353: "Paul has begun his letter by asking for 'grace' to be upon the Colossians (1:2), and it is fitting that he concludes with a similar wish. Their need to continue and grow in their faith in the face of false teaching will be undergirded and stimulated by the continuing work of God's grace in their midst."

³⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 353: "Paul includes a 'grace wish' to his readers in the closing of all his letters (Rom. 16:20b; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21b; 2 Tim. 4:22b; Titus 3:15b; Phlm. 25), and, in every letter except Romans and 1 Corinthians, it comes last."