

Christ In Our Friendships

Colossians 4:7-18

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Not only has the family fallen on hard times, but friendships have fallen on hard times also. Deep lifetime friendships are rare in our fast paced, modern world. Individualism and isolationism are the focus of our culture. But as Christians, we are called to relationship, twofold: number one, our relationship to God, and number two, our relationship to people. Jesus said the greatest commandments are number one, to “love God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength and with all of your mind.” So we are all called into a relationship to God.

By the way, that's what a Christian is. A Christian isn't a person who comes to church and believes in God. It's a person who knows God intimately and personally and has a relationship with Jesus Christ. But out of that relationship, we all need to “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

So number one, you love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and here's the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We have to learn to love others and get along with others and relate to others, whether it be in a marriage, in a family, in the workplace, in the community or in the world. We are to be lovers of God and lovers of men.

We need friends in our lives, and Paul was a friend-maker. There are ten people from Colossians 4:7-18 who Paul speaks of personally and greets. In the book of Acts and in the epistles there are over a hundred names that Paul names who were associated with him and his ministry.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, we read these words: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up.” Two are better than one. If you fall, your friend can lift you up. If your friend falls, you can lift him up. So what a blessing that God would bring friends into our lives.

Jesus had twelve disciples, and He called them friends. He actually said, “I call you My friends.” The Bible also tells us that He was good friends with Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus. I believe that this is the real human side of Jesus. He wanted a place where He could go to relax and connect with friends. So whenever He was in Jerusalem, He would go over to Bethany, and He would stay in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. You know, Martha was a good cook; that might have motivated Him to stay there, as well. Martha's cooking and preparing food, and Mary's sitting at His feet, listening to His words. Lazarus was there. But He was just good friends with these people. I love the human touch of that; that even though He's God in the flesh, He was also man and needed friendships.

We need others. We can't go through life alone. When God looked at Adam in the Garden of Eden before He made Eve, his wife, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone. I will

make him a help meet for him.” God never intended for us to be alone.

I’m going to look with you at verse 7 down to verse 18, and I want to draw some lessons from the friends of Paul the Apostle. I put them in four categories, and I’ll discuss them as we go. The first category is the friends Paul sent. In other words, Paul is writing from Rome. He’s under house arrest. He’s in chains. He’s sending two people back to Colosse, and they would carry this epistle and others with them. Their names are Tychicus and Onesimus.

Now when you come to verse 7, you are at the end of the doctrinal section of the epistle. This now is all just practical salutation and commendation and instruction about individuals. So Paul says in verses 7-9, “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord; whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate...”—“know how you’re doing”—“...and comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.”

Tychicus’ name means “fortunate.” He accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. He was with Paul now in the city of Rome. He was the person who delivered the letter of Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. These are known as “prison epistles,” not counting Philipians. He probably was the one who carried them. Can you imagine that he never thought in his wildest imagination how God would use these letters; that we today, in 2017, would actually be reading his name in the letter itself? He was the one who just walked the dusty road carrying the letter. He probably was thinking Why didn’t he just e-mail it, or why didn’t he just tweet it or why didn’t he do something else? In those days, communication was very slow. You talk about snail mail; this is about as snail as you can get. This is really slow. They had to physically carry the letter, and they didn’t have multiple copies. They only had the one copy.

By the way, Colosse was near Ephesus, and then also in the Lycus Valley was a town called Laodicea—one of the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation was Laodicea—and another city called Hierapolis. So all these epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, and the letter to Philemon—were probably circulated to all those churches that met in homes in this area.

What Paul says about Tychicus’ character is fascinating. Verse 7 says he was “a beloved brother.” Our deepest friendships are in the Lord. The Bible says in Amos 3:3, “Can two walk together, unless they be in agreement?” So if you’re a Christian, you can only have spiritual fellowship, or “koinonia,” with another believer. Now that’s not to say that you can’t socialize, interact or you can’t be friends with a non-Christian. The Bible doesn’t tell us to come out of the world; it tells us to “be in the world.” Jesus was called a friend of sinners, publicans and harlots. So we, too, are to interact with these people, but we only have deep fellowship in the Lord with people who are believers in Jesus Christ. So he says that Tychicus was “a beloved brother.”

Secondly, Tychicus was “a faithful minister.” The word “minister” there doesn’t mean minister

like we would use the word today. We use the word meaning an official pastor or clergyman. What Paul means is that he was a “diakonos”; that he served. We get our word “deacon” from this word “minister” translated here. Weymouth translates that as “a trustworthy assistant.” In other words, he was a dependable friend. A friend who could be relied upon. He was trustworthy and dependable. Someone said, “The greatest ability is dependability.” I like that. Are you a dependable person? Are you a trustworthy friend? Can others rely upon you? In Proverbs 25:19, it says, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.” I like that. By the way, there are a lot of Proverbs and a lot of Scriptures about friendship in the Bible. If you trust someone who is unreliable, it’s like “a broken tooth” or “a foot out of joint.” So Tychicus was a faithful servant.

Thirdly, in verse 7, it says that he was “a fellow servant in the Lord.” The word “servant” here is the word “doulos.” It means “bond slave.” So first of all, Tychicus was a diakonos, a servant to Paul. Paul realized he couldn’t do his ministry alone. We need others to serve with us and to help us and assist us. No one can do the work of God by themselves. We all need others. We need to work together in harmony. So Tychicus was a faithful minister, a faithful servant and a fellow servant in the Lord. They were serving the Lord together. So find friends who have a heart to serve the Lord.

When I was a young Christian, God put around me some guys my age who had a passion to serve Jesus Christ, to live for Jesus Christ. Many of them, myself included, have gone into ministry and become pastors. I think that early stage of my life really encouraged me. “We want to live for Jesus. We want to serve the Lord. We want to be used by God.” So this man Tychicus was that kind of person; he served the Lord together with Paul.

Notice the three things that Paul commissioned him to do. First of all, he was to tell the Colossians how Paul was doing. Notice it in verse 7. “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you.” In other words, when Tychicus gets to Colosse, he is going to inform them how Paul is doing. Secondly, in verse 8, he was going to find out how the Colossians were doing and bring word back to Paul. Then thirdly, verse 8, he was to comfort the Colossians. The word “comfort” there means to “strengthen” them or “encourage” them. It carries the idea of putting fresh heart into them. So he was to gather information, and he was to give inspiration. Friends seek to serve, strengthen and encourage each other.

One of the great friendships in the Bible in the Old Testament is the story of Jonathan and David. Jonathan was the son of King Saul, the king of Israel. Jonathan stood in line to inherit the throne and become the king of Israel, but God had raised up another man, David, to be the king. Jonathan recognized that; he saw God’s hand on David. So Jonathan was willing to forgo being heir to the throne to give himself in support and encouragement to his good friend, David. I don’t know what David would have done without the love, concern, care, support and friendship of Jonathan. Their friendship stands as an example in the Bible of self-sacrifice and denial and commitment as they prayed for each other and encouraged one another and supported one another through difficult times. God brings into our lives good friends. So we need to encourage one another.

In Proverbs 27:17, it says, "Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Just as iron sharpens iron, you want someone who's a friend to sharpen you and encourage you and spur you on to be all that God wants you to be.

So Tychicus is the first person Paul names. Then Paul also sent a man named Onesimus, in verse 9. "...Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here." Tychicus and Onesimus were sent by Paul to Colosse to inform them how Paul was doing.

Onesimus is the runaway slave who most likely stole from his master, Philemon, who was in Colosse. Onesimus he was a fugitive, who ran away from his master, Philemon, to Rome to get lost in the big city. Instead of getting lost, he got found by the Lord. He's the friend with the bad past. Do you have any friends with bad pasts? I had a dear friend, who has gone to be with the Lord. He got saved in prison. He was a bad boy, so he was sent to prison but he got saved and came to know the Lord. That changed that man's life. What a dear friend he was to me for so many years. How I felt the loss on earth of his prayers, encouragement, support and love when he went to heaven.

So we see that Onesimus was a runaway slave, but he got saved and Paul sent him back, verse 9, to Colosse. He was carrying the letter to Philemon, his master, in which Paul said, "Please forgive him and accept him back now as a brother in Christ." Notice what Paul says about him. He is "a faithful and beloved brother." He doesn't say that "He's a runaway slave and has been in prison. Watch out for him." Isn't it great to know that if you are in Christ, "Old things pass away. Behold all things are new"?

I'm not going to ask you to raise your hands, but some of you may be sitting next to an ex-con right now. If we shared our testimonies, it would blow your mind to hear of some of the sinful pasts that are represented in the sanctuary right now. You wouldn't even believe it. But how God changes lives! It's so amazing.

So Onesimus is "a faithful and beloved brother...one of you," verse 9. Paul tells them there that he went to inform them. Friends let friends go. I like the fact that Paul sent Onesimus back and didn't try to hold him back. If you have a friend who God is calling into ministry, encourage them; don't hold them back. Encourage them to follow God's will and purpose and plan for their life. Friends help each other, so Paul wrote to Philemon to help Onesimus.

The second category, in verses 10 to the first part of verse 14, are the friends who stayed with Paul in Rome. The first one is Aristarchus, in verse 10. Paul says, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, saluteth you." Aristarchus was from Macedonia and was one of Paul's traveling companions. He is seen with Paul three times in the Scriptures.

We see him first in Acts 19 when the riot broke out in the city of Ephesus. There was a big riot going on. Wherever Paul went to preach there was either a revival or a riot. How much fun it would have been to travel with Paul! The second time you see Aristarchus is in Acts 27 when

Paul was shipwrecked. He was on the ship with Paul and was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Now the third time we see him is in our passage in Colossians 4:10. He was with Paul in prison.

Don't you like friends like that? "Every time I hang out with you there's a riot, or we get arrested and thrown in prison or we get shipwrecked. My mom tells me I can't hang out with you anymore." Can you imagine his mother saying, "I don't want you hanging out with that Paul anymore. He's a bad influence. You're always getting arrested and thrown into jail or shipwrecked or causing a riot!"

The point is in Proverbs 17:17. It says, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." I love that. If you have a real friend, he'll visit you when you're in prison. If you have a real friend, he'll go for a boat ride with you, even at the risk of being shipwrecked. If you have a real friend, no matter what's happening, he'll run to your rescue when there is a riot. He was a friend with a sympathetic heart. If you have somebody who's really a friend and they're going through a difficult time, you ought to pray for them and go to them and encourage them and try to strengthen their hand in the Lord.

Then Paul names a man by the name of Marcus or John Mark. Notice it in verse 10. He says, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, touching whom ye received commandments. If he come unto you, receive him." This individual we know well; more commonly we know him as John Mark. The name Mark should have a familiar ring. He wrote the Gospel of Mark. His mother was named Mary. It is believed he came from a wealthy family. They owned a house in Jerusalem. It is believed that in Acts 2, the home they were meeting in on the day of Pentecost was in the home of Mary and her son, Mark. And maybe even when Peter was let out of prison and he knocked on the door and Rhoda came to the door—that might have been the home of John Mark and his mother, Mary.

Mark has an interesting story. He left with Paul, Silas and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. About halfway on the journey, he flaked out. He got cold feet. Bible students have a great time trying to figure out why John Mark left the missionary group. A lot of times they bash him; they say he was a "mama's boy" or he was a wimp, missing his mom's food, so he just flaked out. He was too young and he went back. We don't know why he flaked out; the Bible doesn't really say.

But Paul wasn't happy with Mark, because when the time came for their second missionary journey, Mark's uncle, Barnabas, wanted to take Mark again. Paul said, "No, we're not taking him."

"Why not? He's my nephew. I want to take him."

Paul said, "No. He flaked out on our first trip. He didn't go with us, so I'm not going to give him an opportunity to go again." Barnabas and Paul got in an argument. Think about that. These two great men of God actually disagreed with one another. So they split company. Paul took

Silas and went one way, and Barnabas took his nephew, Mark, and went in another direction. So two companies are now going out on the missionary journeys.

However, eventually Paul forgave Mark and gave him a second chance. That's what friends do. In 2 Timothy 4, when Paul was writing his last words in his second imprisonment before he was put to death, he actually said, "Send me John Mark, for he is now profitable to me." So John Mark had flaked before, but friends forgive and friends give second chances. John Mark is the friend who was given the second chance and proved himself worthy, and God used him mightily.

The third individual who stayed is in verse 11. His name is Jesus or Justus. He probably started with the name Jesus, and they changed it to Justus, who is "of the circumcision." Now Aristarchus, Marcus and Jesus/Justus were all Jewish. They all "are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me."

We know very little about Jesus/Justus. He was Jewish and a fellow worker. We can't do it alone. We need help. We need one another. He also brought "comfort" to Paul. The word "comfort" in the Greek is actually a medical term. It was used of a medicine that would bring help and comfort in a time of sickness.

The fourth individual is Epaphras. He is one of my favorite in this list. He is mentioned in verses 12-13. "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers..."—What does he pray?—"...that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis." These are neighboring towns in the Lycus Valley.

Back in chapter 1, verse 7, Epaphras is first mentioned. He was called a "fellow servant" and "a faithful minister." Notice here in chapter 4:12, he says he "is one of you, a servant of Christ." It is believed, and rightfully so, that Epaphras was the pastor of the church in Colosse. He had been sent by the Colossians all the way to Rome to encourage and to comfort and to strengthen Paul and to bring word back. So the church was willing to give up their pastor to go all the way to Rome, because they cared so much for Paul.

What does the Bible say about him here? It says he was a man who prayed. We need friends in our lives who will pray for us. Those are the kind of friends I want. I want praying friends. I want friends who will pray for me, because I need all the prayer I can get. What a blessing it is to have friends who will stand in the gap for us.

How did he pray? Look at verse 12. He prayed constantly. Always. It was a habit. He constantly prayed for Paul and for the believers there in Colosse. He prayed "fervently," "laboring fervently." And then he prayed personally for them: "for you." He was zeroing in on and praying particularly for the believers in Colosse. And he prayed definitely. This is what he prayed: "...that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

By the way, that's a good pattern of prayer: You pray always and you labor fervently. It means "agonizo." It means physically he was agonizing and praying fervently. He prayed for them by name; they were on his prayer list. He prayed definitely; that God would have them to be mature and to grow into completeness in the will of God. In verse 13—I love it—he prayed lovingly. It says, "For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis."

He was the pastor of the church in Colosse, but he cared for the people in Laodicea and Hierapolis. This is the sign of a pastor's heart; he cared about the people of God, and he prayed for them. He agonizes over and intercedes for them.

In my sanctified imagination, I picture Paul and him in jail there together. And by the way, it was very dangerous to be associated with a political prisoner like Paul. Paul was under arrest by the Roman government, was in chains, and if you're hanging out with him, you could be in trouble as well. But Epaphras did not let that get in the way. He was with Paul in prison. I imagine at night when Paul was trying to sleep—he's got chains on him and laying there on his cot trying to sleep—that Epaphras was praying, "Oh, God, I pray for the believers in Colosse! Oh, God!" And Paul said, "Can we get some sleep around here?" You say, "Where's that in the text?" It's not in the text. This is just the white space; okay? I'm just preaching from the white space, a little sanctified imagination.

This is why Paul says, "I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you," because Epaphras is keeping him awake at night. He can't get any sleep. "All he does is pray all the time! He loves you guys so much." Because he was a true pastor, he carried the people in his heart. Friends who care, pray.

By the way, if you want to have friends, you have to be friendly. I've met people who grudgingly say, "I don't have any friends. Nobody's my friend. Nobody likes me. They're all just so messed up! That guys so messed up." I'm thinking Dude, why would you have friends? You're so unfriendly. The Bible actually says, "He who hath friends must pose himself friendly." You want friends? Be friendly. You want friends? Be a friend. People come to me and say, "Nobody says 'hi' to me."

"Do you say 'hi'?"

"No. Nobody says 'hi' to me. I came to your church, and no one shook my hand."

"Did you shake anybody's hand?"

"No, I didn't shake anybody's hand. I was waiting for them to shake my hand."

Well, what's your problem? You want to have friends? Invite them over for food. They'll come eat. Offer to take them out to lunch, and you're paying. You'll have friends. You want to have friends? Put a swimming pool in your back yard. You know, if you want to have friends, you have to pose yourself friendly. A lot of times people don't do that.

Friends pray. They care. Only in eternity will we know how much we owe to the prayers of others. I believe with all my heart that only in eternity will I know the prayers of my grandmother and my mother and my wife and my kids. You don't see my wife up here on Sunday morning preaching, but in heaven she'll have a big crown, and she'll be in the front row, and I'll be in the back row, because she put up with me for all these years. She prayed for me. People come up to my wife and say, "It must be awesome living with Pastor John."

"Yeah. It's just awesome," she says [clenching her teeth].

"He probably glows in the dark; doesn't he? You don't even need a night lite. Pastor Miller just glows."

She's going to have a real reward when we get to heaven, because she prays for her husband. She's probably praying for me right now. What a blessing it is to have friends who pray.

There is another friend, the fifth friend, in verse 14. His name is Luke. He's called "the beloved physician." He wrote the Gospel of Luke that bears his name, and he also wrote the book of Acts. He was a Gentile and was a traveling companion of Paul. He was a doctor, and Paul probably needed a doctor with him. How cool is that that God provided a doctor to travel with Paul and to tend to his own personal needs. How would you like to have your own doctor who hung around with and took care of you? He was a friend with a special talent. He used his gift to help Paul. He stayed with Paul to the bitter end.

He joined Paul on the first journey to Philippi and stayed on as their pastor. He connected again on the third journey and stayed with Paul all the way to and during Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem, Caesarea and during which time he started his Gospel and the book of Acts. Then he went with Paul on the ship that was wrecked and brought into Rome. He was with Paul again in Rome, and he finished up his book of Acts during Paul's imprisonment. So what a blessed friend this man was. He used his gifts to help Paul.

We need people who are gifted and use their gifts to serve along with us. He stayed with Paul. He was such a dear friend that in 2 Timothy 4:11 and 16, Paul says, "Only Luke is with me....At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."

The second epistle of Paul to Timothy and particularly the last chapter, chapter 4, is one of the most emotional chapters I could read in the Bible. I can't read that chapter without feeling that emotion. This is where Paul says that "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course....Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." Paul knew he was going to die. These were his last words. He said, "I was brought to trial before Nero, and all my friends forsook me. I looked around and no one was there." In Paul's great time of need, no one was with him. But he said, "Only Luke is with me." How touching that is. The good old Dr. Luke stayed with Paul all the way to the very end. We need friends "who will stick closer than a brother." Jesus, of course, is our friend in our time of

greatest need and throughout life. So Luke was “the beloved physician.”

The third category we have is the friend who strayed. Just a little mention of him at the end of verse 14. “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.” Demas is mentioned only three times in Paul’s letters. In the three references, they tell a sad story. The first reference is in Philemon 24, where Paul says, “...Demas...my fellow laborer.” He’s mentioned here in Colossians 4:14 where Paul says, “...Demas greets you.” He’s last mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:10. Again, in these last words written by Paul. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.” So note the progression there. First, it’s “my fellow laborer”; he’s serving along with Paul. Then it’s just “Demas greets you.” Then it’s “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.”

We don’t know specifically why Demas forsook Paul, but we do know generally that it was because of a love for “this present world.” The Bible tells us, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” The world is described as “the lust of the flesh,” which are your passions; “the lust of the eyes,” which is your possessions; and “the pride of life,” which is your position. So Demas loved the world, but “The world passes away and the lusts thereof.” But the Bible says, “He who does the will of God will abide forever.”

So Demas is one of those friends who disappoint us. I wanted to say that; friends will and can often disappoint us. What’s the lesson? Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don’t put all your stock in your friends. It’s great to have a trustworthy friend, an encouraging friend, and serving the Lord together, but if they fall away from the Lord—if they backslide and go back into the world—don’t let that stumble you or offend you. I’ve met Christians who say, “I don’t go to church anymore, because I knew this guy who backslid.”

“Well, why should you backslide because he backslid?”

“Well, I just don’t want to follow Jesus anymore because they were really strong Christians, and they turned away.”

Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ. Do you know that Jesus will never disappoint you? He’ll never let you down. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don’t let other people stumble you.

Then, lastly, there is the fourth category of friends who Paul saluted, verses 15-18. Paul says, “Salute....” This is Paul’s closing salutation; people he’s saying “Hi” to. “Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea and Nymphas...”—By the way, Laodicea was that lukewarm church of the last days in Revelation 3—“...and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.’ The salutation by the hand of me, Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.”

I want you to notice these two individuals. They are Nymphas and Archippus. It says in verses 15 and 16 to say “Hi” to Nymphas. He is the one who had the church in his house. The early

Christians met in homes. If the church got too large to meet in the home, it met in multiple homes. They didn't own buildings or large structures, so they met in homes. These epistles would be read in the homes. Notice verse 16: "And when this epistle is read among you..."—there in Colosse—"...cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans." He's telling them to read this letter from Colosse to the Laodiceans, and they would read it also in Hierapolis.

When we open our Bibles, we can all read together. You can follow me. This is why I encourage you to bring a Bible to church. It's why we read the text. You have a Bible; right? You can read your Bible. But in those days, Paul would write a letter, and one would carry it. That's all they had. So what they would do is one person would be the reader, and the whole congregation would be the listeners. That's why Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy." Each church would have a reader, and each church would have listeners. They would read the Bible. It wasn't until later on that they would actually begin to translate those original writings, and each church would have their own copy of the originals. Paul said, "I want you to read this epistle in the church of Laodicea. And, likewise, the epistle from Laodicea, I want you to read that one as well."

Our last individual is Archippus, verse 17. It is believed that he was the interim pastor in Colosse. Epaphras had gone from Colosse to Rome, so Archippus had stepped up and taken his place. Archippus seemed a little hesitant, a little sheepish about the ministry that God had given to him. So Paul tells him to "Take heed to the ministry which thou has received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."

Notice that the ministry had been given to him by God. I believe that God gives us our ministries. He gives us our gifts and abilities and our calling, and He gives us our ministries.

Secondly, Archippus was warned to be careful to guard it, to watch over it. If God has entrusted you with a ministry, watch out. Be very careful.

Then, thirdly, fulfil it. Bring it to completion. Do what God has called you to do. I take very, very seriously the commission that God has given to me to preach and teach the Word. I am very careful about how I do it. I want to complete it. I want to fulfil it. I want to keep preaching and doing what God has called me to do until God calls me home to heaven. Because when I get to heaven, I want to hear those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

So what motivates me is not you—though I like you. What motivates me is not the need in front of me but is the call behind me to preach and teach the Word. Otherwise, why would I read all these verses this morning? I'm just exhausted reading this text twice, and I've got another service to go. Let alone, what I say about these verses. This is a lot of text. I'm worn out. But I do this because it's what God has called me to do: "Preach the Word."

I want you to notice, in conclusion, verse 18. The "salute" starts in verse 15 and ends in the

“salutation” in verse 18. “The salutation by the hand of me, Paul.” Now Paul dictated his letters. He didn’t write the whole thing. He had a amanuensis. He had a secretary. He would dictate the letters. I picture Paul just laying down and talking out loud under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God superintended it and it was written down. But what Paul would do is he would take the pen, and he would sign his name at the end. “...by the hand of me, Paul.”

Then notice what he throws in: “Remember my bonds.” “Remember my chains. Don’t forget to pray for me. I’m in jail. I have chains on.” Can you imagine trying to write your name with shackles on? The clunk of the chains. And as he moved, he was encumbered by the chains.

This week I was thinking about that. I was trying to imagine what it would be like to not only be in prison but to actually be in shackles. He was a traveler; he went all around the world preaching the Gospel, and now he’s in chains. There are shackles on his wrists and on his ankles. When he signs his name, you can hear the clunk of the chains. They probably would get in the way of the parchment as he was writing his name. “Remember my bonds.”

We need friends to remember us. We need friends to pray for us. Friends to lift us up and encourage us. Friends with whom to serve the Lord together.

This marvelous epistle that spoke so much of the preeminence of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ and the adequacy of Christ and that we are complete in Christ—how does it end? “Grace be with you. Amen.”

False teachers were preaching legalism, but we need to be established in the grace of God. Amen?

Let’s pray.