

Col 4:7-18, Final Greetings
October 14, 1995
H. Van Dyke Parunak

Overview

1. The whole book grows out of two summaries:
 - a) 1:3,4 introduces 1:5-20 chiastically (abc -> CBA)
 - 1) 3a, Give Thanks -> 12-10
 - 2) 3b, Praying -> 9-12 (12 transitional)
 - 3) 4, Heard -> 5-8
 - b) 1:21-23 introduces 1:24-4:17 via unfolding (abc -> CBABC)
 - 1) 21-22 Reconciled (position) -> 2:9-15
 - 2) 23a Continue (practice) -> 2:4-8; 2:16-4:1
 - 3) 23b Preached (Paul's ministry) -> 1:24-2:3; 4:2-17
 - c) 1:1,2 and 4:18 are epistolary overhead.
2. The balance of the book (except for the epistolary close) brings us back to Paul's ministry. It itself is chiastic, with two groups of ministry-related exhortations surrounding a roster of his associates.
 - a) 2-6, Exhortation to share in his outreach to the lost
 - b) 7-15, Greetings from those in Rome, to those in Colossae, and endorsement of the messengers
 - c) 16-17, Exhortation to share in his ministry to the saints

A. 7-15, Greetings

Three groups: the messengers, those remaining with Paul, those in Laodicea.

1. 7-9, The Messengers: Tychicus and Onesimus
 - a) Their identity
 - 1) Tychicus: first appears in Acts 20:4, an Asian accompanying Paul on his return from Macedonia to Troas at the end of the third missionary journey, on his way back to Jerusalem. From then to the end of the apostle's life he is associated with him, carrying letters (Col 4:7; Eph 6:21) during the first imprisonment, doing errands during the subsequent release (Tit 3:12) and second imprisonment (2 Tim 4:12). Perhaps a business traveler (cf. Lydia) who becomes a believer in Corinth and makes himself available to the apostle for traveling chores.
 - 2) Onesimus: the runaway slave from Colossae who made his way to Rome, met Paul and was saved there, and is now returning to his master Philemon.
 - b) Their characteristics: note how these emphasize the parity between Paul and these brothers, and deemphasize his position

as a distinguished apostle.

1) Beloved Brother (Both). This is the primary relationship among believers, and we should shun (as the apostles did) any titles that would push this relationship in to the background. Matt 23:8-10; no NT precedent for using "pastor" or "apostle" as a title. Never a reference to "pastor Timothy" or "the apostle Paul" (though we do have "our brother Paul," 2 Pet 3:15).

2) Onesimus is also characterized as a "faithful brother." "Faithful" may indicate either that he is worthy of having faith placed in him, or that he is a believer, one who has faith in the Lord Jesus. Associated with "brother," the sense here is probably the latter; he is a brother not in the sense of being a fellow Jew, but as a believer in the LJC.

3) Tych: "Faithful minister" or "servant."

a> Here "faithful" certainly means "trustworthy."

b> Whose minister is he? Though Paul elsewhere speaks of sending him places (Tit 3:12; 2 Tim 4:12), and Paul may benefit from his service, the consistent usage of the NT is that as a servant he belongs to God. Compare the parallel description of Timothy as "brother, minister, fellowlaborer" in 1 Thes 3:2, and note that while he is Paul's brother and fellowlaborer, he is God's minister.

c> *Notes on case relations with diakonos in the NT:*
1> *of God or Christ: beneficiary (ultimate) (should there be a "sender"?) Rom 13:4; 2Cor 6:4; 11:23; Eph 6:21; Col 1:7; 4:7; 1Thes 3:2; 1Ti 4:6*
2> *of another master: 2Cor 11:15; Gal 2:17*
3> *of a church or Israel: beneficiary (mediate): Rom 15:8; 16:1; Php 1:1; Col 1:25; 1Ti 3:8,12*
4> *of the gospel: instrument by which ministry is done; object ministered: 2Cor 3:6; Gal 3:7; Col 1:23*
5> *1Cor 3:5 combines sender and beneficiary*

4) Tych is also called "fellowservant in the Lord." Far from serving Paul, both he and Paul are bondslaves of the same divine master.

c) Their mission

1) 7a, 9b, Tell the Colossians how things are going with Paul. Background for prayer. Note that Paul devotes the letter to teaching and exhortation, and leaves the personal news to the messenger, rather than the other way around; contrast the form of most missionary prayer letters, and even the restriction imposed by some "prayer letter services" that missionaries must not "preach" in their letters!

- 2) 8a, "that he might know your estate." Paul wants news of them so that he can uphold them in prayer and perhaps in further written ministry (cf. the circumstances under which 1 Thes was written, 1 Thes 3:5-8).
- 3) 8b, "comfort your hearts." All the written material in the world can't give the encouragement and exhortation of a person face to face. Tychicus is not merely to carry the letter, but to administer it to them.

2. 10-14, Greetings from those with Paul

Three groups within these: Jewish believers, the Colossians' own messenger to Paul, and two Gentile members of his team.

a) 10-11, The Jewish believers

- 1) Aristarchus: A Jew from Thessalonica who, unlike most of the Thessalonian Jews, received the gospel and followed Paul on his subsequent journeys. We find him with Paul in Ephesus on the third journey, (Acts 19:29), then accompanying him back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) and setting sail from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:2). Was he also under charges, since he is here called Paul's "fellowprisoner," or does he bear that title because of his willingness to share Paul's captivity and keep him company (cf. Philemon 23,24, where Epaphras but NOT Aristarchus receives this title).

2) Marcus: A turning point in a most touching story.

- a> This verse and Acts 12:12 show that Barnabas was brother (in law) to Mary, in whose home the early church met in Jerusalem. Since the house is in her name, probably she is a widow. Hypothesized to have been the site of the upper room, cf. the possible self-portrait in Mark 14:51.
- b> Acts 12:25-13:4, Barnabas brings him along to Antioch and then on the first missionary journey to Cyprus, which was Barnabas' original home (Acts 4:36), perhaps to nurture him in the Lord by introducing him to ministry among his ancestral people.
- c> Acts 13:13, when the Spirit guides them on to Asia rather than back to Jerusalem, Mark bails out.
- d> Acts 15:37-39, Paul has no time for the quitter, but Barnabas continues to nurture him, leading to a split between the two.
- e> By our reference, Paul is willing once again to consider him a "fellowworker" (cf. Philemon 24) and to contemplate the possibility of sending him on a later

mission to Colossae. Amounts almost to a reversal of Acts 15; shows the effectiveness of Barnabas' patient care of his nephew.

f> 2 Ti 4:11, Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark along when he visits, since it would be useful to have his help. A further confirmation of the value of Barnabas' work.

g> 1 Pet 5:13, with Peter in "Babylon" (Rome?). Traditionally held to have worked closely with Peter in later years, and to have written his gospel mainly from Peter's accounts.

3) Jesus Justus: No further information. "Justus" probably translates Heb. *zadok* and designates a particularly observant Jew (cf. its application to James the Lord's brother in Eusebius 2.23). Faithful adherence to Jewish practice did not itself turn people away from association with Paul.

4) Their significance:

a> They are of the circumcision, that is, Jews.

b> These are the only Jews who have been Paul's fellowworkers. Compare Acts 28:17-31, which anticipates how the Jews were mixed in their response to the gospel. Of the entire Jewish community in Rome at that time (names of eleven synagogues have been preserved), only three would join hands with Paul in building the kingdom of God.

c> He gratefully records the encouragement they have brought him. Never neglect the blessing your support can be to those who seek to serve the Lord.

b) 12-13, Epaphras: Introduced in 1:7 as the person who first brought the gospel to Colossae, and whom the church there has sent as its representative to Paul ("on your behalf a faithful minister of Christ"). Paul appends to this greeting his own description of how Epaphras, though separated from his brethren at Colossae, continues to minister for them in prayer. We can take an example from HOW Epaphras prays, WHAT he prays for, and WHY he prays.

1) How he prays: "laboring fervently," lit. "struggling, agonizing." Cf. Moses' conversation with God about the consequences of the golden calf in Exodus 32,33, or Abraham's pleading on behalf of Sodom in Gen 18. Effective prayer is not just a listing of requests, but anticipating the accusations and obstacles of the accuser, and arguing against them, thus entering fully into the heavenly counsels. A heavy and burdensome task, but at the same time a most honorable one, for it includes us in heaven's

cabinet.

2) What he prays: "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

a> "Stand ... in all the will of God": that you may exhibit these characteristics, whatever God may permit to come to pass. He is not praying for happy circumstances for them, but rather for their maturity in whatever circumstances God brings upon them.

b> "Perfect and complete" express the desired spiritual state from two different metaphors.

1> "Perfect" is the word Paul usually uses, and means "mature," reflecting a metaphor of birth and growth (1 Cor 3:1; 14:20; Heb 5:12-14). Epaphras wants them to be spiritual adults in dealing with every new circumstance that God's will brings to them.

2> "Complete" is the same word used in 2:10. Lit. "filled up," reflects a metaphor of a container (Rom. 9:21-23; 2 Cor 4:7; 2 Tim 2:20-21) that can have more or less of something. Commonly used of the HS in the believer. We have all of the HS, but does he have all of us? Cf. John 12:3, the house filled with the odor of the ointment. The word may have special force in Col since the gnostic doctrines made much of the divine "fulness," which Paul declares (2:9) to be in Christ and thus in his people.

3> Thus, Epaphras prays that they might be mature (viewed as living organisms), and full of all that God has for them (viewed as vessels). Both their own development and their endowment from God should be complete and lacking nothing.

3) Why he prays: His zeal for them and the others near them. ("For" goes with "he has," not "I bear him witness," which functions as an orienter, see Callow on Col; Aronoff on Heb accents). He has an ardor for them, a deep love and jealous concern for their spiritual well-being. Effective ministry stems from a loving concern for those cared for as well as a sense of obedience and duty to God.

c) 14, Two Gentile members of his party

1) Luke, who traveled with Paul over much of his life (cf. the "we" sections of Acts) and documented his ministry and the life of Christ in his two-volume work. This is the passage that tells us he was a physician. He was not only valued because of his skill, but "beloved." The personal connection enabled and supported the professional.

- 2) Demas, still working with Paul at this point, but later to abandon him for worldly concerns (2 Tim. 4:10) during the second imprisonment.

3. 15, Greetings to Individuals in Laodicea

- a) Why no greetings to individual saints in Colossae? Perhaps because
 - 1) Paul does not know many of them personally, since he had not planted this church;
 - 2) The accompanying epistle to Philemon already greets the individuals whom he does know.
- b) The greeting to Laodicea focus on a house-church hosted by Nymphas, of whom we know nothing further.

- 1) But note the widespread custom of churches meeting in homes:

Reference	City	Date	Host
a> 1 Cor 16:19	Corinth	55-56	Aquila & Priscilla
b> Rom 16:4,5	Rome	57	Priscilla & Aquila
c> Col 4:15	Laodicea	60-62	Nymphas
d> Phm 2	Colossae	60-62	Philemon

- 2) This is an *example*, not a *command*, and we should be cautious about condemning those who do have a permanent structure. Each group must follow the HS's leading in their particular circumstances. Yet there are good reasons for perpetuating the NT practice wherever possible.
 - a> There is NO NT evidence for a local church meeting anywhere other than in a home. The school of Tyrannus in Acts 19:8-10 was a place for daily public proclamation by Paul during a limited two-year period, not the site of a local assembly.
 - b> Matt 18:20 emphasizes the legitimacy of small local gatherings that cannot justify a special building. We need to seek encouragement in having the Lord in our midst, not in a large social group.
 - c> A building must be supported out of the gifts of the saints, and the NT teaching about such gifts, both by example and by command, gives no justification to such stewardship. On the contrary, the believer's stewardship is to be focused on needy believers.
 - d> A building can become a weight that pulls us away from following the Lord.
 - 1> People come because of the building, not because of the Lord.
 - 2> Need to keep income up to support the building leads to compromising the message or practice of the church.

3> Where there is material wealth, there is a lever for Satan to control. Property title; legal regulations; something to sue for.

3) Summary: If we need a building, God will guide and provide, and we will thank him for it. But there is no need to run on ahead and seek a building for its own sake. Home meetings have ample NT precedent and blessing.

B. 16-17, Final Exhortations

1. Exchange of epistles: indicates that Paul knew that his letters had a purpose beyond the single church to which each was written. Stimulated by the needs of a single church, each was valuable to the body of Christ as a whole, and should be preserved and circulated. This simple exhortation is the kernel from which the NT canon grows.

2. What is "the epistle from Laodicea"? Two main possibilities:

a) Paul may have written an epistle to the church at Laodicea, which has not been preserved for us. In fact, we have copies of a very short "epistle to the Laodiceans" (about 270 words, shorter than Philemon), dating to the sixth century, which had mixed support as canonical down to the 15th century, and only with the reformation was completely rejected by both sides as a forgery suggested by this passage in Col. It is made up mostly of phrases from Philippians, with a few from Galatians and elsewhere mixed in, consisting of a general warning against false teachers, assurance of Paul's steadfastness, and exhortation to godliness. The reference might be to this epistle. Not everything that Paul wrote was included in the canon.

b) Note that our text speaks of an epistle, not "to," but "from Laodicea." Most likely, the letter in question is another of the canonical epistles that is circulating among the churches. Laodicea is on the main road, from which Colossae lies a short distance away; an epistle circulating through Asia Minor would likely go through Laodicea before reaching Colossae, and so to them would be "the epistle from Laodicea." Very likely it is the epistle to the Ephesians, which bears some signs of having been intended as a circular letter.

3. 17, the exhortation to Archippus.

a) Named elsewhere only in Philemon 2, where Paul calls him a "fellow-soldier," and where his association with Philemon and Apphia suggests that he is their son. Recall that most of the Lord's disciples were members of his extended family; recall the house-church; and realize the centrality of the family as the basic building block of the church.

b) He has received some ministry in the Lord.

1 Pet 4:10 is a helpful parallel.

- 1) It speaks of "receiving" (*lambanw*, the base form of "receive" *paralambanw* used here) a "gift" in the sense of a spiritual gift, a usage of "receive" attested also in Acts 2:38, cf. Rom. 5:17.
 - 2) "Every man" has received such a gift; cf. 1 Cor. 12:7, 13, that is, every man who is "in the Lord," which is the term used here.
 - 3) Peter observes that the purpose of spiritual gifts is to "minister" one to another, the verb from which "ministry" in our verse is derived.
 - 4) Compare 2 Tim. 1:6, "stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands," which brings in an added element of recognition in the church (one that may be present in our text as well, cf. *para* in *paralambanw*). But this is only a possibility.
 - 5) Summary: God has given Archippus some spiritual gift, which may or may not have been officially recognized by the church (say, in appointment to eldership or deaconate). He is to be exhorted to fulfill this ministry, to carry out the work that God has given him to do.
- c) The church is to exhort him to pay attention to this ministry. Shows that we are responsible for exhorting one another in our ministry. Also would make the church much more receptive to the exercise of that ministry, and may be a way of empowering Archippus in his work: if the church has said to him, "Be sure to fulfill his ministry," then they will have to pay attention if that ministry involves some measure of exhortation or correction toward them.
- d) *Application*: Each of us needs this challenge continually. We are not simply recipients, but also ministers in the church of God, and must answer to him for how we discharge our ministry. As God asked Moses, "What is that in thine hand," Exod. 4:2, and then did with it far more than Moses dared hope, so here he asks us to "take heed" to what he has given us, and use it for him.

C. 18, Paul's Signature

Three parts:

1. Authentication by means of a line in his own hand (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; 2 Thes. 3:17, which says it is "the token in every epistle." Though he often (usually?) dictated his epistles (cf. Rom. 16:22, where the slave adds his greeting), he always added a final greeting in his own handwriting to authenticate the epistle as from him.

2. Request for their prayer: "remember my bonds." We noted in 4:2-4 that he rises above his personal circumstance, but that should not lead us to think that he enjoyed it. It was a considerable burden to him, and here he briefly asks for their intercession.
3. Benediction to them: "Grace be with you."
 - a) The consistent ending to all Paul's epistles and Hebrews (Eph has 3rd person rather than 2nd); Rev. ends with a 3rd person in MT, though 2nd in TR. So this may actually be the sign, the specific words that Paul writes in his own hand "in every epistle.
 - b) Compare with the constant introduction to his epistles, "Grace to you." What is the difference between "grace to you" at the start, and "grace with you" at the end?
 - 1) "Grace to you" emphasizes their possession of the grace, and focuses on them as the recipient. Paul never gives a verb with the greeting, but the parallel of 1 Pet and 2 Pet suggests an optative. As believers, they will certainly be in possession of God's grace, but he wants them to enjoy it.
 - 2) 1 Cor. 15:10 suggests that "grace with" someone enables for service. Cf. 3:16 and 4:6, doing something "with grace."
 - 3) Thus the general pattern in Paul's epistles is to greet his readers with an acknowledgment that they are recipients of God's grace, and end by challenging them to demonstrate that grace in service to him. Compare the common overall order of his epistles, moving from doctrine and position to exhortation and practice!

Analysis

A. 2-6, Personal Exhortations

1. 4:2 Th^h proseuxh^h proskarterei^{te},
 - a) grhgorou^{ntes} e)n au)th^h e)n eu)xaristi/a|,
 - b) 4:3 proseuxo/menoi a(/ma kai\ peri\ h(mwⁿ,
 - 1) i(/na o(qeo\s a)noi/ch| h(miⁿ qu/ran tou^h lo/gou,
 - a> lalh^{sai} to\ musth/rion tou^h Xristou^h,
 - 1> di' o(\ kai\ de/demai,
 - 2) 4:4 i(/na fanerw/sw au)to\ w(s dei^h me lalh^{sai}.
2. 4:5)En sofi/a| peripatei^{te} pro\s tou\s e)/cw,
- a) to\n kairo\n e)cagorazo/menoi.
3. 4:6 o(lo/gos u(mwⁿ pa/ntote e)n xa/riti, a(/lati h)rtume/nos,
- a) ei)de/nai pw^s dei^h u(ma^s e(ni\ e(ka/stw| a)pokri/nesqai.

B. 7-15, Greetings

1. Endorsement of Tychicus and Onesimus
 - a) 4:7 Ta\ kat' e)me\ pa/nta gnwri/sei u(miⁿ Tuxiko\s
 - 1) o(a)gaphto\s a)delfo\s
 - 2) kai\ pisto\s dia/konos

- 3) kai\ su/ndoulos e)n kuri/w|,
- 4) 4:8 o(\n e)/pemya pro\s u(ma^s ei)s au)to\ tou^to,
a> i(/na gnw^| ta\ peri\ h(mw^
b> kai\ parakale/sh| ta\s kardi/as u(mw^
b) 4:9 su\n)Onhsi/mw|
1) tw^| pistw^| kai\ a)gaphtw^| a)delfw^|,
2) o(/s e)stin e)c u(mw^
c) pa/nta u(mi^n gnwri/sousin ta\ w(^de.
- 2. Greetings from those with Paul
 - a) The Jewish believers:
4:10)Aspa/zetai u(ma^s
1))Ari/starxos o(sunaixma/lwto/s mou,
2) kai\ Ma^rkos o(a)neyio\s Barnaba^
a> [peri\ ou(^ e)la/bete e)ntola/s, e)a\n e)/lqh| pro\s
u(ma^s de/casqe au)to/n],
3) 4:11 kai\)Ihsou^s o(lego/menos)Iou^stos,
4) oi(o)/ntes e)k peritomh^s
a> ou(^toi mo/noi sunergoi\ ei)s th\n basilei/an tou^
qeou^,
b> oi(/tines e)genh/qhsa/n moi parhgori/a.
 - b) Epaphras
1) 4:12 a)spa/zetai u(ma^s)Epafra^s
a> o(e)c u(mw^
b> dou^los Xristou^,
c> pa/ntote a)gnwizo/menos u(pe\r u(mw^ e)n tai^s
proseuxai^s,
1> i(/na sth^te te/leioi kai\ peplhrwme/noi e)n panti\
qelh/mati tou^ qeou^.
 - 2) 4:13 marturw^ ga\r au)tw^| o(/ti e)/xei zhlon polu\n
u(pe\r u(mw^ kai\ tw^n e)n Laodikei/a| kai\ tw^n e)n
(Ierapo/lei.
 - c) 4:14 a)spa/zetai u(ma^s Louka^s o(i)atro\s o(a)gaphto\s
kai\ Dhma^s.
- 3. Greetings to particular people
 - a) 4:15)Aspa/sasqe tou\s e)n Laodikei/a| a)delfou\s kai\
Nu/mfan kai\ th\n kat' oi)^kon au)to)u e)kklhsi/an.

C. 16-17, Final Exhortations

- 1. 4:16 kai\ o(/tan a)nagnwsqh^| par' u(mi^n h(e)pistolh/,
poih/sate i(/na kai\ e)n th^| Laodike/wn e)kklhsi/a|
a)nagnwsqh^|, kai\ th\n e)k Laodikei/as i(/na kai\ u(mei^s
a)nagnw^te.
- 2. 4:17 kai\ ei)/pate)Arxi/ppw|, Ble/pe th\n diakoni/an h(\n
pare/labes e)n kuri/w|, i(/na au)th\n plhroi^s.

D. 18, Paul's Signature

- 1. 4:18 (O a)spasmo\s th^| e)mh^| xeiri\ Pau/lou.
- 2. mnhmoneu/ete/ mou tw^n desmw^n.
- 3. h(xa/ris meq' u(mw^.