



SERMON NOTES

US N^o. 142

Date: May 11th, 2014

Title: We few, we happy few

#8 in the Series on the Letter to the Colossians

1. Review

- a. The epistle to Colossians specializes in theological abstraction, it is difficult to preach and teach because it is the ideas of faith that are at stake, not the actions of faith.
- b. Summary
 - i. The letter
 - ii. Who Jesus is
 - iii. Who we are in Christ
 - iv. Reconciliation and restoration

2. The inner life of prayer (cf. Col. 4:2-4)

- a. Three characteristics
 - i. Be devoted. The phrase "*continue earnestly*" connotes earnest adherence or gritty determination and speaks of great effort being applied.
 - ii. Be vigilant.
 1. Once again, eschatology matters and this exhortation partially implies a perspective towards when Christ returns and God will answer every prayer fully. The word for watchful modifies and intensifies Paul's exhortation to pray, calling for vigilance or alertness to petition God for all that agrees with God's eschatological plans.
 2. And In the immediate context, persistent and vigilant prayer is an ingredient of the church's evangelistic mission: believers must pray that those in need of God's salvation be converted before Christ returns.
 - iii. Be thankful. A thankful prayer expects God's answers and recognizes that salvation finally belongs to the Lord and is the work of God's grace.
- b. The purpose of prayer. Elsewhere in Paul's writing the image refers to the occasion for conversion granted by God through the preaching of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12-14; Acts 14:27). Despite the fact that Paul was in chains for his faithfulness to the gospel, he knew that he ought to speak it in a way that would make it clearly evident. Paul wanted prayer that he would continue to make the gospel clear and evident, even if it meant more chains.
- c. A.C.T.S. (see 1-13-13)
 - i. **A**doration – putting to words the gratitude that ought to be in our hearts.
 - ii. **C**onfession – acknowledge your sinful acts and mindset.
 - iii. **T**hanksgiving – for what God is and thanksgiving for what He has done.
 - iv. **S**upplication – make your requests in line / light with God's Word and Will

3. The exterior life of proclamation (cf. Col. 4:5-6) The Christian life isn't only lived in the prayer closet, there also must be practical, lived-out Christianity, which lives wisely
 - a. "*Outside*" refers to non-Christians and those Christians who stand outside of correct teaching.
 - b. Paul was especially concerned about the negative effect immature believers have on the lost. Since we authenticate God's salvation by our lives and words, we can either harm or enhance God's reputation by our bad or good example
 - i. How many non-Christians cite the poor behavior of Christians as a reason to not convert? If we as believers remain in vice and despair, without any proof that God's grace makes the difference, who but the fool will believe the claims of the gospel?
 - c. Paul exhorts us to "*redeem the time*" because there is an end (eschatology matters) and because there are souls being lost. Therefore, a wise community exploits every opportunity it is given for evangelism.
 - i. Being vigilant in prayer develops a keen sense of people and opportunity. Believers should have a personal interest and involvement in their setting, apathy is contrary to Christian vigilance. (cf. Jer. 29:7)
 - ii. This is more than just being a "*good Samaritan*," it's a share in evangelizing and discipling.
 - d. The wise community is also eager to proclaim the gospel by engaging the lost in conversation that is "*full of grace, seasoned with salt*." This phrase captures the wisdom of ancient rhetoric that ideological substance without personal style fails to convince people. If a believer, who has a wonderful story of conversion to tell, cannot tell it in a "*salty*," interesting way, the story will not be listened to. The church needs more story-tellers.
 - i. Obviously, lively stories can be used in the service of lifeless substance as well.
 - e. Paul may also be linking human graciousness, a characteristic of effective communication, with divine grace. The gospel of God's saving grace will be strengthened by a ministry characterized by a generous civility.
 - f. The evangelist who makes the most of every opportunity finds a "*gracious and salty*" answer for every sincere query or malicious challenge facing the church.
 - g. "*That you may know how you ought to answer each one*." Paul expected Christians to answer from Biblical truth and to work at knowing how to communicate those answers to those who are outside. This is an important idea connects with the earlier passages of Colossians. Paul has spent considerable time in this letter explaining the truth and refuting bad doctrine. Yet all the correct knowledge was of little good until it was applied in both the prayer closet and the public street of daily life.
4. Personal notes from Paul. Paul's primary interest is to gird up his apostolic authority to strengthen the prospect for a successful evangelistic campaign, in keeping, then, with his preceding exhortation.
 - a. Tychicus and Onesimus, messengers of the letter. (cf. Col. 4:7-9)
 - i. Tychicus is described as "*a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord*." Because Paul is unable to leave Rome (imprisoned), he sends a delegated authority in his place that he hopes will be received with honor and respect.

1. Tychicus was of the province of Asia, in Asia Minor, of which Ephesus was the capital. (cf. Acts 20:4) It is possible that he was from Ephesus itself and that he was well known to the church there. He carried the letter to the Colossians (cf. Col. 4:7) and probably the Second Epistle to Timothy. (cf. 2 Tim. 4:12) Paul also proposed to send him to Crete to succeed Titus (cf. Titus 3:12) The Greeks speak of him as one of the seventy disciples, and make him bishop of Colophon, in the province of Asia. [Barnes]
2. Because of the threat of false teaching in Colosse, Paul sends Tychicus to minister and serve in encouraging their hearts; the very purpose Paul has assigned to himself. (cf. Col. 2:2)
- ii. Onesimus was a slave owned by a believer (Philemon) in Colosse, but he ran away and came into contact with Paul in Rome. While there, Onesimus became a Christian and a dedicated helper to Paul. His story is continued in Paul's letter to Philemon, but Paul lets the church know that Onesimus is one of them now.
- b. Greetings from Aristarchus, Mark and Justus. (cf. Col. 4:10-11)
 - i. Paul's admission that only a few Jews participated with him in the Gentile mission may reflect the growing rift between the church and synagogue as well as between Gentiles and Jews within the church (cf. Acts 15:1-4; Acts 21:17-26; Gal. 2:1-3:5) The other Jews in Rome stood aloof, and doubtless endeavored to augment the trials of the apostle. (cf. Acts 28:23-29)
 - ii. Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (cf. Acts 20:4), was one of Paul's travel companions, and was with Paul when the Ephesian mob seized Paul (cf. Acts 19:29). He was also with Paul when he set sail for Rome under his Roman imprisonment (cf. Acts 27:2). Paul calls him a fellow prisoner and it appears that Aristarchus had a habit of being with Paul in hard times. William Ramsay suggests that he actually made himself Paul's slave so that he could travel with him on this journey to Rome.
 - iii. Mark was the cousin of Barnabas, which we learn in this passage, and had been the cause of the falling out between Paul and Barnabas. (cf. Acts 13:5, 13:13, 15:36-40) By the time Paul wrote this all was in the past. Because Paul identified Mark in terms of his relationship with Barnabas, it appears that the Colossian Christians knew who Barnabas was. This could either be from his reputation or through further missionary journeys that were not recorded in the Book of Acts. This serves to remind us that the Book of Acts is an incomplete record of the history of the early Church, many more people were out and about.
 - iv. Justus is little known though his name suggests a Roman origin.
- c. Greetings from Epaphras (cf. Col. 4:12-13)
 - i. Paul calls Epaphras a "*bondservant of Christ*," a phrase that he often applied to himself, but never to anyone else, except here and in Philippians 1:1 where he speaks of himself and Timothy together as bondservants of Jesus.
 - ii. Paul's strong and extraordinary endorsement of Epaphras (4:13) would seem unnecessary, given his previous association with this congregation (1:7-8), unless there is some trouble in his relationship with the Colossian believers. He may very well be the founding father of the

Colossian congregation and therefore the more specific object of ridicule by the opponents of the Gentile mission in Colosse.

- iii. Epaphras prayed that the Colossian Christians would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.
- iv. Epaphras prayed with zeal because he cared deeply for the church there.
- d. Greetings from Luke and Demas. (cf. Col. 4:14)
 - i. Luke. This is the one passage that informs us that Luke was a physician
 - ii. Demas was most likely known by the Colossians, but nothing positive is said about him. In Philemon 1:24 he is grouped among Paul's fellow laborers. Yet in the last mention of him (cf. 2 Tim. 4:10), Paul says that Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world, and that he had gone on to Thessalonica.
 - 1. *"...we have the faint outlines of a study in degeneration, loss of enthusiasm and failure in the faith."* [Barclay]
- e. Greeting to the Laodiceans and Nymphas. (cf. Col. 4:15)
 - i. Laodiceans. This was the same city later mentioned in the scathing rebuke of Revelation 3:14-22, and it was a neighboring city of Colosse.
 - ii. Nymphas. There has been some considerable debate as to if Paul referred to a man or a woman with this name. Some manuscripts have the masculine form and some have the feminine.
 - 1. Having no buildings of their own, the early church met as *"house churches"* that were a part of the larger Church within the city.
- f. Instructions for spreading the message in this letter. (cf. Col. 4:16)
 - i. They were instructed to share their letter with the Laodiceans and equally to read the letter he sent them. The *"epistle from Laodicea"* may be the letter to the Ephesians or another letter that has been lost in antiquity.
 - 1. This helps us to understand how and why the letters would have been copied almost immediately, and how slight differences in copying the manuscripts could come in at an early date.
- g. A special word to Archippus (cf. Col. 4:17)
 - i. The importance of Archippus's ministry is underscored by the expression *"received in the Lord,"* which may refer to a special commission not unlike Paul's own (cf. 1:25). Perhaps it is his leadership within the house church (cf. Philemon 1:2), and Paul is reminding him of his strategic role for fear that he has fallen under the influence of the Colossian philosophy.
 - ii. Ministry principles:
 - 1. God has ministries for His people to do; Eph. 2:10, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*
 - 2. True and authentic ministry is received in the spirit of the Lord and not in our flesh.
 - 3. However, ministry may be left unfulfilled.

4. Therefore, we must take heed to our ministry in order for it to be fulfilled.

5. We should also encourage others to fulfill their ministry.

h. Conclusion (*cf.* Col. 4:18)

i. There is much emotion, sorrow, and strength in this simple phrase. Paul not only knew the confinement and loneliness of the prisoner; he also had the uncertainty of not knowing if his case before Caesar's court would end with his execution.

ii. Paul's conclusion is the only one possible for the apostle of grace, confronting a heresy emphasizing elaborate hidden mysteries and righteousness through works. We can only go forward safely in the Christian life if grace is with us.

5. Take-aways

a. Our private prayer life is keenly important.

b. Be devoted, vigilant and thankful.

c. ACTS

d. Redeem the time by exploiting every occasion to share our hope in Christ.

e. Redeem the time the seasoning our witness with wit and Biblical truth.

f. Church authority structure.

g. The Demas warning.