

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

“Pursuing God in Our Church” Colossians 4:7-18

That song is so true. In fact, it's true here every week. The molding and shaping us into the will of God comes from the renewing of your mind so that we can be transformed by God. We renew our mind by reflecting on God's Word. We will be doing that this morning from Colossians 4. We will be finishing up Colossians today. We will have done 14 messages in Colossians, this will be the last one. I feel as though I've gotten into the end zone and need to spike the football or something like that. We will be doing Colossians 4:7-18 this morning and it's about pursuing God in the Church. As in the church we should be functioning in certain ways and as we look through a group of people here in the end of the book we will learn about how they function and how we should be an example to others as we function as well.

I'll read it for you, **“As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.”**

Here we have quite a list of names of people and we can learn something about these people as we look in different places. But maybe the most basic thing we can learn is that these people are functioning toward a common end. In the church they are seeking to build up the church and its effort to reach more people for Christ, and to be strengthened in the church.

We, in our generation, in America, tend to be very individualistic, we have our own ways of doing things, we're our own individual. We can take a church or leave a church as it may suit us. I don't know if you may have met some people who have their own beliefs in God and they may read the Scripture, they may be Christian, but they kind of think churches are more of a nuisance than anything else and really don't participate. There are others who show up as it suits them, and participate in however it may please them, when they are not getting the chance to do something else.

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But these people, as we look at here, were not these kinds of people; they were the people that were quite committed to one another, to the church of Christ and to serve the church of Christ with their lives. And this is really what our model should be, to serve Christ as these people did. These people provide a great example to us in various ways, as we'll look through this.

But before we get to look at the details, I'd like to bring you where we've been. These are the last words of the Book of Colossians. The very first words, the first chapter, had to do with grounding the church in faith. Knowing who Christ is, He is God Himself who came to reconcile man to Himself, that's first place, we start from that point. But chapter 2 warned the church to be guarded from error. There's all this worldly philosophy, man's ideas of improving mankind that isn't true and we need to be guarded against this in order to be directed in truth according to the Word of God. If then we are directed in truth according to the Word of God we will be able to grow in our faith in our relationship to God. We will be seeking the things above, focused on the things above where Christ is. In that as we focus our mind on the things above, we will be able to set apart sin from our life and put on righteousness and we will become a more and more holy individual. But holiness isn't just for the sake of holiness in and of itself, its to be fruitful in this life, to bless those around us.

This is the last section, Colossians 3:18 to the end of chapter four, to grow the church in relation to others. So as we become holy and serving God more completely we will be fruitful and there is instruction given to families, to slaves and masters, to evangelism and now to how the church should function in itself. So we'll look at the first section at how the church should be pursuing God as it relates to itself.

Verses 7-9 have to do with two people, Tychicus and Onesimus and their faithfulness. They are both called faithful and they're both called brothers. So I've called them the faithful brothers, Tychicus and Onesimus.

We'll look first at Tychicus. Tychicus we find in several other places in the Scripture. We find him in Acts 20:4 as one of those companions of Paul, of Thessalonica. Then in Ephesians 6:21 we find him being sent to the Ephesians to encourage them. We also see that in 2 Timothy 4:12, he's sent there as well. In Titus 3:12 he's being sent to Crete by Paul. And here he's now sent to the Colossians.

So he becomes sort of a liaison of Paul to churches. He has been commissioned to go to various places and minister on Paul's behalf. This even happens today. It even happens in our church because whenever you have a large group of people, not just a small group, but hundreds and hundreds of people that require being ministered to, this cannot be done by happenstance or by one individual. There needs to be some planning, and there needs to be people that will be commissioned to minister to certain other people. We've done this in various ways, in certain ministries, in groups, Growth Groups, and these people are being set aside by the church to focus on this ministry.

If we didn't plan this and organize this, not only back then but now, ministry would not happen nearly as effectively as if it is organized and planned.

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We have a youth ministry for example that has a leader over the youth ministry, but there are just too many people in the youth ministry, there are maybe a hundred highschoolers that we are trying to minister to. There needs to be people who are more targeted to a sub group of those people to minister more effectively, this is the same thing that was happening there. That Paul sent certain people to certain places to function in ministry.

There's another person, Onesimus. Onesimus we learn about in the book of Philemon. The book of Philemon is written to Philemon who was a master who had Onesimus as a slave and he ran away. He abandoned his master and in his fleeing he ran across Paul in Rome. Paul, when he's writing this book of Colossians and he's writing the book of Philemon as well. He is in Rome, he is in prison. So in his imprisonment he came across Onesimus who was a runaway slave. He encouraged Onesimus to go back to Philemon and in order for Philemon to receive Onesimus back he is sending a letter, the letter of Philemon, to Philemon to encourage him to receive him. Welcome him back, if he caused any harm, if Onesimus did anything to cause Philemon any harm, Paul says charge it to my account.

The reason he does this is because Onesimus has embraced Christ in Rome and in his faith in Christ he is now a faithful and beloved brother, verse 9 says who's one of your numbers, so we learn from this that Onesimus is from Colossi and we learn also that Philemon too must be from Colossi. Onesimus is considered faithful and is part of this journey with Tychicus to inform the church of Colossi about Paul and his situation, so Paul is entrusting Onesimus with this journey. He has a high regard for him.

In Onesimus we find a great example of forgiveness, even though he had abandoned his master, he has been forgiven. He's not only forgiven of any debt to Philemon, he is considered worthy of this task of being sent back with this letter, the letter of Colossians was being delivered with Tychicus and Onesimus and also the letter of Philemon was being delivered by these people back to Colossians.

They are called faithful and in their faithfulness we can learn some things. Their faithfulness shows their concern in the information that is being given. They have been entrusted with information and they've learned this information because of their concern, their concern for Paul and their concern for the church of Colossi and they are willing to be the deliverers of this information.

Their concern is seen in their gathering and delivering of the information. In their faithfulness we also see cooperation. Their cooperation can be found in their participation, their willingness to go and serve in this function. This isn't just go across town and do this, this is traveling from what is Rome in modern day Italy to what is now modern day Turkey, the small town of Colossi which is now in ruins and doesn't exist anymore. They participated in this journey, no small undertaking to get there, no cars, no trains, it was a journey that was difficult. And finally the comfort. This comfort is found in the words in verses 8-9, **“For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know {about} our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.”**

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They will inform you about the whole situation here. Their visitation, their willingness to travel and to be with this church shows their faithfulness in comfort and encouragement. Now we too can comfort and encourage one another in visitation, in participating in being willing and available to go and bring information and share fellowship with one another. As opposed to many, in modern churches today, that come and sit and listen and leave and don't participate. We must be participating in order to be all of what God really has designed us to be as Christians functioning in His church. These people are models for us and we should follow their example.

There's another group of people, the fellow workers. The fellow workers are Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus called Justus. First Aristarchus, we find out about Aristarchus in the book of Acts. In Acts we find him with Paul. He's with Paul in the persecutions as Paul is being attacked. He is with Paul here in the imprisonment with Paul. He's willing to go and to be with Paul and suffer for the sake of the kingdom of God. **“Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.”**

This person Mark is the same person who wrote the gospel of Mark. This Mark is first seen in Acts chapter 13 and he is seen in the first missionary journey, he goes with Paul and deserts Paul and leaves. So Paul, not wanting to have this repeated again in Acts 15 chooses not to want to have him with him as he goes on another missionary journey. Barnabas, on the other hand finds Mark being worthy of coming along on their missionary journey and wants him to come with him. This created a sharp disagreement, and from this passage, Colossians 4:10, we get a little more insight because Mark is called Barnabas's cousin. Maybe that gives us understanding of why Barnabas would be more sympathetic to Mark, and Paul would be less sympathetic to Mark in his departure. So Mark, also known as John Mark, in the Scriptures, went with Barnabas.

In their disagreement they felt it most effective for Barnabas to carry out a ministry in one place and Paul to carry out a ministry in another place. Acts takes us along the route of Paul and follows his ministry and that's the last we see of Mark and Barnabas in the book of Acts. But we do find out more about Mark later on. At the end of Paul's life he felt Mark was so significant he writes this in 2 Timothy 4:11 **“Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.”** So Paul changes his view full circle, instead of seeing him of no useful service, he now sees him as useful and somebody who is helpful to him. So Mark is a good example of someone who has had a stumble and overcame that through a life of faithfulness.

He finally shows up in the end of the book of Peter where Peter calls him my son Mark, this close relationship he had with Mark, which gives some insight into the gospel of Mark. We can see Matthew wrote from Matthew's experiences and John wrote from John's experiences those gospels as they were with Jesus. Mark wasn't with Jesus but Mark is a close associate of Peter's and Peter calls him my son. And so we can find Peter's experiences and story coming out in the gospel of Mark and also as you see Peter's words in Act 10 and Acts 11 you can see a lot of similarities with the gospel of Mark. Mark was so important that he was given the role, by God, of writing the gospel of Mark.

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But with the church of Colossae they might not have received him as quickly as they should have. This is why you have these words after Barnabas's cousin Mark. These words, **“about whom you have received instruction if he comes to you welcome him.”** They may have heard about this disagreement between Barnabas and Paul and the failures of Mark, so Paul now needed to say, welcome him. Allow him to, if he comes to you, participate with you because he is faithful.

The next person is Jesus called Justus. And that's all we know about Jesus called Justus. We don't know any more information about him other than what's in this passage. **“Jesus called Justus, along with Aristarchus and Mark are the only fellow workers of the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision.”** In other words, these are Jewish people and they were an encouragement. They were an encouragement because they served faithfully with Paul.

As you are ministering to people recognize this, you are not only ministering to the person or the people you are ministering to, you're having a secondary ministry to those around you who are also ministering. You are an encouragement to others who are seeking to labor with you in ministry. We can serve one another by being encouraging in our faithfulness to other people to continue to serve faithfully. Their faithful ministry was an encouragement to Paul. As Paul's ministry was an encouragement to others.

The next person the fervent servant, Epaphras. **“Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.”** Epaphras only appears one other place in Scripture. that's Colossians 1:7 and we look at Colossians 1:7 and we find he is a very significant individual in the beginnings of the church of Colossi. Perhaps even the founding person. They have a hope that has been laid up for them that's come and now born fruit.

So he had an important beginning role in the development of this church as well as his concern for the church of Laodicea and Hierapolis. These two towns were very close to Colossae, they are near each other. Laodicea, you may be familiar with in the Book of Revelation. There's a message from Jesus to the church of Laodicea and He says that they are lukewarm. He would rather they be hot or cold, but because they are lukewarm He will spit them out of His mouth unless they repent and change, so He calls them to change. An interesting historical geographical information about the church of Laodicea is, it existed with the waters coming from Colossae and Hierapolis. Now still today there are hot springs in Hierapolis, and in Colossae there were cold mineral waters and these waters came to Laodicea and formed a lukewarm water. To give some historical background why Jesus used that reference to give them a greater sense of their lukewarmness, they needed to be more fervent in their faith and to repent.

So Epaphras had a ministry to the church of the Colossians, he had a ministry to the church of Laodicea and to the church of Hierapolis. In these churches, he was no longer able to be there. He was now with Paul in Rome. In spite of that he prayed and we can see that we can always serve people through prayer. Even though Epaphras wasn't with them, he labored earnestly in his prayer. That's the emphasis here, labored earnestly in his prayer to stand firm.

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Paul sought Epaphras as praying and having some ministry in his prayer so that they can stand firm in the will of God, be perfected. So we can have a ministry with people even if we don't have personal contact with them. We can develop their faith by praying for them fervently. And we should do that. Epaphras is a fine example of this.

Next is the favorite author, the favorite author is Luke. There is a passing reference to Luke in Philemon and there is another reference to him in 2 Timothy 4:11 where Paul says only Luke is with me. Luke remained faithful to him at the end of his life. Luke's faithfulness is one reason why he's beloved, he was consistent and he remained with Paul.

There are other reasons why he's beloved. He's beloved because he was a physician and like physicians today he helped people feel better, medically. In fact, it's interesting that some of the most notable protestant missionaries in history were trained in medicine, David Livingstone, who went to Africa, and Hudson Taylor, who went to China. Most likely because many people, particularly years ago, went into the medical profession in order to help people, to serve people. I realize some people today go because it is a very lucrative profession. But I suspect there are still some people that go into the medical profession in order to help people. Luke did that, he sought to serve people as a physician.

He also served people in other ways. He served people as being a companion of Paul in the missionary journey. We find him, occasionally, in the book of Acts, not by name but by pronoun. Luke is the author of the book of Acts and as he is authoring, often, there is they did this and they did that, but sometimes there's a we were doing this. Paul had Luke with him and he was doing ministry with Paul on occasion. So Luke became beloved in that way as well.

And finally and I think most notably for us today, Luke should be respected and beloved because of his work in writing the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. As you look at this, Matthew, John, they were disciples, they were there, they wrote of their experiences. Mark wrote from Peter getting his source of information from Peter. Luke tells us he did research, he went with Paul, meeting people, learning more about Jesus and His life and he wrote it down so he could compile the Gospel, and the same with the Acts of the Apostles. He went and gained and researched and gathered information to put together his writing, and God inspired that writing. So we respect Luke and he is beloved to us because he has ministered greatly to us in providing the gospel of Luke and the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles.

We can say this on the life of Luke; the path to being beloved is through serving others. If you feel people are not loving you enough, do what Luke did, think of ways that people can be well served. And Luke was willing to exert the effort to travel, to study, to write so that others can be blessed and they saw him as beloved.

There's another person, the other person is the future apostate, Demas. Demas we find in Philemon 24, a passing reference and in 2 Timothy 4:10, **“For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica;”** A very telling statement, having loved this world. He cared more about the things of this world than he cared about God so he left, he deserted. And in Demas we can see another element of the church, some people are beloved, some people are serving fervently and some people are deserting.

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I remember the person that baptized me 20 something years ago ended up being church disciplined. Sometimes these are surprising things, people you thought were so faithful end up doing things that shock you, having loved this present world. But this is just part of how things are. Jesus teaches these words, you may wonder why can't we do something about this, why aren't we a little more proactive in solving this problem, well here are the words of Jesus in Matthew 13, He teaches that the church consists of wheat and tares, Matthew 13: 24-30, **“He presented another parable to them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’” And he said to them, “An enemy has done this!” And the slaves said to him, “Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?” But he said, “No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’””**

In the same way we have wheat and tares among us, the tares being those people who profess faith in Christ but aren't true believers, who may even be doing things that true believers do, even serving in ministries that true believers are serving as well. But in this they in themselves love the present world, and it may come to fruition that this will be evident that they will depart or maybe not until the end where this will be discovered. But, what we do is minister faithfully to everybody and we don't become concerned about who are the wheat and who are the tares and try to figure that out and root out the tares because in this we damage the wheat. So our ministry, your ministry should be to be faithfully serving everyone, and if they are professing faith then we take that on their profession and we work with them but who knows what the future holds. When Paul wrote the book of Colossians he did not know what the future held with Demas. Demas appeared to be a fellow brother and he is one of those who are giving greetings. But come to find out he loved this present world and he departed. Be on guard because this is going to happen. It happens to every church.

Now there are the final injunctions. These last verses in the Book of Colossians give some statements that are injunctions. The first is greet, **“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.”**

Some translations have a masculine name for Nympha. There is some textual discrepancies but Nympha is most likely the most accurate. But there is a church that is meeting in her house and these brethren are to be greeted. This should be our role in greeting the brethren, be participating with one another and to share greetings and welcoming.

Notice that this church is in her house, this gives us the role of the church. The church is to be participating together whether you have a building or you don't have a building. They didn't have buildings then and as we plan to build a building to serve people better, this is truly optional. There is no ministry that is mandated that we have a building. We can continue to fulfill God's will just as they did without a building. It just so happens in our society, in our culture in the 21st century, buildings are very handy to have.

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And if you have ever been part of a church that didn't have a building, you come to appreciate how difficult it is in this day and age without having a building to meet in. They did not have buildings back then, that did not deter them from ministry and if an earthquake comes and levels our buildings, ministry will go forward.

Then there is the next injunction in verse 16, read, **“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.”**

This shows us the role of God's Word. The role of God's Word is critical. We are to be reading it and the church of Colossae was not to keep their letter with them but they were to pass it to others to the church of Laodicea because this was God's Word to be ministering to others and it's now come down to us today.

Not only is the letter of the Colossians to be read, there's a letter that's coming from Laodicea that's to be read. Now this is interesting, what is this letter from the Laodiceans? Did we lose it? Maybe. Paul wrote a lot of things. I'm sure he wrote grocery lists, he wrote letters to mom. These letters were not inspired by God they were not the Scripture, just certain writings that he wrote were inspired by God in Scripture. So one possibility was this letter was just one of the many letters he wrote that wasn't Scriptural and doesn't survive today.

There's another possibility and that this letter coming from Laodicea is a circular letter that we now know as the letter to the Ephesians. In the letter to the Ephesians, the word to the Ephesians is not in the best manuscripts, the oldest manuscripts, which leads to the conclusion that Ephesians is a circular letter and even if you look at the writing of it, it kind of fits the pattern that is more general in nature and its very possible that Ephesians went from church to church and came from Laodicea and to Colossae to other places. There's speculations of other things but the point being that whatever this letter is if it were Scripture we would have it today and God would have preserved it. But what he does preserve should be read and should be studied. The role of God's Word in the church.

Next is take heed, from verse 17, **And say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.”**

In heeding we find the role of work that in ministry we must fulfill what God's will and role is for us. This is spoken about most clearly in Ephesians 2 verse 10, I know you are familiar with Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, that no one should boast.”** Verse 10 builds on that, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

So God has prepared for each one of us who believes in Christ good works before hand that we should walk in them. There's no guarantee but he has designed us to fulfill a ministry, each one of us.

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And if we are faithful we will fulfill the ministry of good works that God has prepared for us. Archippus needed to be faithful to this ministry and fulfill it and not lose heart and grow weary. You too must fulfill this ministry that God has given to you and to work at it, He's prepared it beforehand. He hasn't just called you for salvation to enjoy fellowship with you forever. He has a purpose for you, to serve others, to love the brethren and to fulfill your ministry whatever that is. How do you fulfill your ministry? You get busy about doing things and as you're busy about doing things you will discover how God uses you to bless others best. It's a trial and error thing, so be busy about fulfilling your ministry.

The last words of Paul he takes the pen says Paul, verse 18, **“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.”** This greeting emphasizes grace and this is what we need to emphasize as we conclude the book. The role of God's grace because none of this book can be done apart from God's grace. We need God's grace to know the truth. We need God's grace to avoid error. We need God's grace to focus our minds on the things above. We need God's grace to put off sin and put on righteousness. We need God's grace to serve others in our family and our work place, in our evangelism and in our church. God's grace is fundamental so Paul ends, **“grace be with you.”** By God's grace we can pursue righteousness and fulfill our ministry.

Let's pray that we can do this with God's grace. That God's grace will be poured out to us so that our ministry in this church can be full.

Lord, we thank You for Your goodness and grace to us that You have given us the knowledge of Your truth. We pray that we will have a heart that will be receiving this eagerly. We pray that we will have a mind that will be set on these things above and we will be learning so that we can be true disciples abounding in good works. We pray that the good works we are doing will be fruitful and will be serving others not serving ourselves. In Jesus' name, Amen.