

Complete in Christ: Complete in Christ to Serve Christ Corporately

Colossians 4:7-18

November 5, 2017

The book of Colossians begins by teaching us who we are in Christ, and the book ends by showing us how to live in Christ. Paul makes it clear that while we are saved individually, we are saved to serve Christ corporately alongside other believers. Paul was an excellent example of all that he preached, especially team ministry. Paul believed so strongly in team ministry, that he brought a small “church” with him everywhere he went. These coworkers were so important to Paul that he devoted almost one fourth of this letter to highlighting them and commending them. What we’ll learn from this passage is that every Christian is to serve Christ in team ministry.

1. The church is a family (7-9).

1.A. Believers are all brothers and sisters in the family of God (7-9). Paul called Tychicus a “beloved brother” and he called Onesimus a “faithful and beloved brother.” Paul was a Jew, while Tychicus and Onesimus were Gentiles, but they had all placed their faith in the same Savior, making them “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (1:12).

1.B. Believers have all been placed into the body of Christ, of which Christ is the head (1:18). Once we were the enemies of God, but now we’ve been made co-heirs with Christ.

Application: The church is not the building. It’s those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Believers have a closer bond than even blood relatives. If you have trusted Christ, you are part of the family of God with countless brothers and sisters! It is your responsibility to surround yourself with like-minded brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you can serve Christ!

2. The church is a diverse in social and ethnic background but singular in doctrine (9-11).

2.A. The church is diverse in social standing: Onesimus was a slave (9). He was a Colossian, but he had run away to find refuge in Rome. Somehow he was converted through Paul’s prison ministry in Rome, and in a short time he had proven his faithfulness to the Apostle Paul. So much so, that Paul entrusted him and Tychicus with this letter. He had become a beloved brother to Paul and was a great comfort to him in his Roman imprisonment. Paul makes no mention of Onesimus’ position as a slave. Instead, he commends him to the Colossian church as a “beloved brother.” The church is a place where social standing should not matter!

2.B. The church is diverse in ethnic background: Paul’s team was made up of Jews and Gentiles (10-11). Paul was a Jew, but his team was predominantly comprised of Gentiles. Of his 12 team members, only three were Jews, Aristarchus, Marcus, and Jesus-Justus.

Aristarchus took turns with Epaphras being voluntarily imprisoned with Paul so that they could minister to him (Philemon 23). Paul calls him a fellow-prisoner and a fellow-laborer.

Marcus was Barnabas’ nephew, who deserted Paul during the apostle’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:13) and chose to return to Jerusalem. Barnabas tried to persuade Paul to take Mark on their second missionary journey, but Paul refused, which led to Paul and Barnabas going separate ways (Acts 15:26-40). Now twelve years later, Paul instructed the church at Colossae to receive him, indicating reconciliation between Mark and Paul. In Paul’s final letter, Paul instructed Timothy, “Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”

Jesus-Justus is only mentioned here.

All three of these were converted out of Judaism – “who are of the circumcision” (11a). Apparently, they were the only converted Jews laboring alongside Paul in his Roman imprisonment. They were a comfort to Paul, likely because they were the only three converted Jews who encouraged Paul and sympathized with him in his view of the kingdom of God (Ephesians 3:2, 6). Sadly, most converted Jews believed that their Messiah would only save those who converted to Judaism, and they persecuted those who would not convert. These three Jewish believers had doubtlessly suffered much for their faith. Their choice to spurn the Judaizers and to embrace the truth of completeness in Christ and Christ alone was a great comfort to Paul (11c).

Application: Paul did not discriminate against someone of different ethnic origin. Instead, he chose to surround himself with others of like faith. Too many people today choose a church based on their ethnic background rather than doctrinal beliefs. The primary bond of any church should be truth, not ethnicity.

3. The church ministers one to one another (13-18).

3.1 The church ministers to one another through prayer (12-13). Epaphras was a Colossian who was likely converted during Paul's 3 year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10). After his conversion, he started a church in Colossae, his home town, and also in Laodicea and Hieropolis. Epaphras likely traveled to Rome to seek Paul's guidance concerning the false teaching that was spreading in Colossae. Epaphras was deeply concerned for these baby churches, and his concern was expressed in fervent prayer.

"Laboring fervently" (12) has the idea of competing for a prize. Epaphras had a great zeal for the believers in these churches because he had led them to Christ, and now they were about to be stolen away and destroyed by false teaching. Even 1200 miles away, Epaphras could compete against the devil and the false teachers through prayer.

"That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (12) – Epaphras prayed that they would "stand fast" mature in their completeness in Christ, which was God's will for them.

Application: Every Christian, no matter how young or old, is to minister to one another through prayer, praying for one another, and with one another, husbands with wives, parents with children, Christian with Christian!

3.2. The church ministers to one another by meeting tangible needs (14). Luke began traveling with Paul during the apostle's second missionary journey into Macedonia. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts which comprise nearly a quarter of the New Testament. As a doctor, he likely ministered to Paul's many physical maladies (Galatians 4:13-14). Paul loved him dearly.

Luke didn't have a "leadership" gift such as evangelist, pastor, or deacon, but God used him mightily, not only as an integral part of Paul's church planting team, but as the foremost historian of the New Testament.

Demas (14b) is the only one named without a commendation. This is significant. Demas eventually forsook Paul (2 Timothy 4:10). It appears that Demas was already beginning to drift spiritually. Demas lost sight of the ministry that he had with Paul, and he let the world distract him.

Application: God desires to use our gifts, personalities, and experiences to compliment the gifts of others within the church body to increase the effectiveness of the church's mission. Don't let the world distract you from accomplishing the ministry to which God has called you and equipped you to accomplish!

3.3. The church ministers to one another by ministering the Word one to another (15-17). Nymphas had opened his home to the church of Laodicea (15). These home gatherings were more than just social occasions; they were meetings for instruction from God's Word. Oh, that every Christian would use their home for the study of God's Word!

We can minister the word one to another by simply reading it to one another as Paul instructed these churches to do (16), husbands with wives, parents with children, Christian with Christian, and Christian with the lost.

Application: Ministry springs out of Bible study and prayer. Without Bible study and prayer, there is no real ministry!

3.4. The church ministers to one another only as individual believers choose to fulfill the ministry they've received (17). Archippus was likely a pastor of one of the two cities. He may have been newly ordained, which he had received from the Lord! It wasn't his choice. God had thrust him into the ministry, but he was responsible to take up that charge.

3.5. The church ministers to one another through the Grace of God (18). In closing, Paul reminded the believers of his bonds. The reason that he was in prison was because he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Because of his ministry for Christ, Paul had been imprisoned. But his ministry there continued. It continued so powerfully, that a church was started in Rome that included members of Ceasar's household! But just as Paul could not accomplish his ministry without the grace of God, neither can we. The ministry to which God has called us is always too much for us, but God's grace is always available to sustain us. Choose to be a minister of God's grace to someone before you leave this morning! Choose to be a minister of the grace of God to someone far from God this week!

Conclusion:

1. Have you become part of the family of God? You have to be born into it spiritually. Have you been born again?
2. Do you evaluate a church based on its ethnicity or its adherence to Bible doctrine?
3. Are you ministering to others through prayer, Bible reading, and through your individual gifting?