

“Part of God’s Army”

September 3, 2017

Colossians 4:7-18

I. Introduction

In the early 1600’s, John Donne wrote a devotion in which is found the familiar quote: “*No man is an island entire of itself.*” This thought is true for the work of Jesus Christ, too. [Romans 8:16-17](#) says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” Peter wrote in [1 Peter 2:9](#), “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” In [2 Timothy 2:3](#) Paul wrote, “Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” All Christians belong to one family—the family of God. We are part of a holy nation and we are part of God’s army. No Christian is an island entire of himself or herself.

An army may be made up of people with different ranks and different jobs, but each individual and each job is necessary so that the army as a whole can function and be successful. The same is true for God’s army; no one ministers or serves alone. Paul SELDOMED ministered alone. There is only time we find him alone in the Book of Acts, that is in [Acts 17:16-34](#) when he is alone briefly in Athens. Even when he was a prisoner in Rome as he wrote Colossians, he still was not alone. Here in the closing verses of Colossians, Paul named 8 men who served with him—eight men who were willing to be associated with a prisoner. In these verses we see 8 men with 8 different gifts and talents and histories.

II. Eight Members of God’s Army

A. Tychicus First, there was Tychicus. *Tychicus was a man with a servant’s heart.* He served with Paul for many years. He is mentioned 5 times in the New Testament. Near the end of Paul’s 3rd missionary journey, when Paul left Ephesus to take a special offering back to Jerusalem; [Acts 20:4](#) says that Tychicus was one of the seven men who accompanied him. Tychicus’s willingness to travel with

Paul to Jerusalem showed his servant's heart. The trip to Jerusalem would be difficult and dangerous. Tychicus would be away from his family, friends, and church for a long time. But he went.

As Paul wrote Colossians, it had been more than two years since his arrest in Jerusalem. Since then he had survived a plot by the Jewish leaders to murder him, trials before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, and a death-defying voyage to Rome. Tychicus may have been there to experience it all. He definitely was with Paul during his imprisonment at Rome. Because he was a man of proven loyalty and service, Paul gave him the important task of delivering this letter to the Colossians. Not only did he carry Colossians, he also carried the Letter to Philemon. [Ephesians 6:21-22](#) says that he carried Paul's Letter to the Ephesians as well. His journey across Italy, the Adriatic Sea, Greece, and the Aegean Sea to reach the coast of Asia Minor (Turkey) would not have been easy. Not only would he deliver the letter, he would also bring information about Paul—his health, his hopes, and his future plans.

It would seem that after he delivered the letters, Tychicus returned to Paul. After Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome, Tychicus went with him. When Paul needed a temporary replacement for Titus as pastor of the church on Crete, Tychicus was one of two men considered ([Titus 3:12](#)). At the very end of Paul's life, during his 2nd Roman imprisonment, Tychicus was still with him. Facing imminent execution, Paul desired to see Timothy one last time. [2 Timothy 4:12](#) says that Tychicus was sent as Timothy's replacement.

Paul gave 3 characteristics of Tychicus that qualified him to act as Paul's personal representative. First, he was "a dear brother." He was one of the family of believers. Because of his faithfulness and overall character Paul called him "dear" or "beloved." Second, he was "a faithful minister" or servant. He never became one of the "greats" but he served God faithfully as he served Paul. Finally, he was "a fellow servant"—actually, a fellow bond-slave with Paul in serving the Lord. Then there was....

B. Onesimus *Onesimus was a man with a shady past.* He was the runaway slave whose return to his master was the reason for the book of Philemon. Philemon was one of the leaders of the Colossian

church. Onesimus had run away from him and made his way to Rome. There he met the Apostle Paul, who led him to Christ. Now Onesimus was on his way back to his master. Paul wrote to urge Philemon to forgive Onesimus for running away and deceiving him and instead to welcome him back as a brother in Christ.

Although he was a runaway slave Paul described Onesimus as “our faithful and dear brother.” [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Onesimus was a testimony of the power of God to transform a life. He may have been a believer for only a short time, but he had already proven himself to Paul. Paul showed his respect for him by having him, along with Tychicus, “tell you everything that is happening here.” Third is ...

C. Aristarchus *Aristarchus was a sympathetic man.* He was a Jewish believer and a native of Thessalonica ([Acts 20:4; 27:2](#)). He willingly risked his life in the Ephesian riot found in [Acts 19:28-41](#). He, too, sailed with Paul on his return trip to Jerusalem ([Acts 20:4](#)) and was on that fateful voyage to Rome ([Acts 27:4](#)), which meant he experienced the storm and shipwreck.

Aristarchus stayed with Paul no matter what the circumstances; he was a sympathetic, caring man. It isn't likely that he was an official Roman prisoner. “Fellow prisoner” probably meant that he willingly gave up his freedom to minister to Paul's needs. The Lord's work would not be done if it were not for people like Aristarchus who humbly bear hardships without the fame of those they serve faithfully.

D. John Mark is the 4th man. *John Mark or Mark was a man with a promising future.* Things hadn't started out well for him. When Paul and Barnabas set out on Paul's 1st missionary journey, they took John Mark with them as their assistant, but when the going got tough, Mark abandoned them and returned home to Jerusalem ([Acts 13:5-13](#)). Fortunately, the story didn't end there. By the time Paul wrote Colossians, Mark had become a changed man. The man whom Paul had once rejected became one of his greatest helpers. In [2 Timothy 4:11](#), Paul told Timothy, “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is

helpful to me in my ministry.” Mark is an example of God’s ability to use failures. In fact, he later was given the privilege and responsibility to write one of the four Gospels. Then there’s . . .

E. Jesus Justice *Jesus Justice was a faithful man.* He represents those faithful believers who serve God but whose deeds are not announced for the whole world to know. He was a fellow worker with Paul and a comfort to him—and that is all we know about him. We can be sure though, that the Lord has kept a faithful record of his life and ministry and will reward him accordingly.

F. Epaphras *Epaphras was a praying man.* Although he was away from his home church, he continued to lift them up in prayer: “he is always wrestling in prayer for you.” The word “wrestling” means “agonized.” It is used in **1 Corinthians 9:25** to speak of the grueling competition endured by athletes in the games. Prayer was a serious business with Epaphras. The goal of his prayers was that the Colossians and their fellow churches “may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” All the men Paul named must have prayed, but prayer was Epaphras’s major interest and ministry. We need believers today who are prayer warriors—men and women who lift up their church leaders and their church in prayer as well as believers in other places.

G. Doctor Luke *Luke was a man with specialized talents.* Luke was Paul’s personal physician, as well as his close friend. He was a Gentile believer who traveled frequently with Paul on his missionary journeys. After joining Paul on his 2nd missionary journey, he was with him for most of the remainder of Paul’s life. Like Paul he was an educated and cultured man. God used Luke to write the Book of Acts as well as the Gospel bearing his name. Luke is a glowing example of the professional man or woman who uses his and her skills in the service of the Lord and goes wherever God sends. He was a devoted Christian, a skillful physician, a devoted friend, and a careful historian—all wrapped up in one. Finally, there was . . .

H. Demas *Demas was a man with a sad future.* Demas was with Paul in both of his imprisonments, but unlike Paul’s other companions, Demas had a sad future. Paul wrote of Demas’s activities in

2 Timothy—[turn to 2 Timothy 4:9-10](#). The pull of the world eventually become irresistible to Demas and he abandoned both Paul and the ministry. Demas thought he could serve two masters, but eventually he had to make a decision; sadly, he made the wrong decision.

III. Concluding Remarks

Finally, Paul closed by asking the Colossians to **“Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.”** He also told the Colossians that they were to pass his letter on to the Laodicean church and to read the letter coming from that church. No one knows for sure, but many scholars feel that this letter coming from the Laodicean church was the Book of Ephesians.

Paul went on to remind Archippus that his ministry was a gift from God and that he was a steward of God who would one day have to give an account of his work. Since the Lord gave him his ministry, the Lord could also help him carry it out in the right way. Ministry is not something we do for God; it is something God does in and through us.

Paul usually dictated his letters to a secretary (an amanuensis) and then signed his name at the end. He would also add a sentence about the grace of God, for that was his *“trademark.”* The combination of his signature and *“grace”* gave proof that the letter was authentic.

IV. Conclusion

Paul recognized that he was not self-sufficient. He needed the help of all those listed. He obviously recognized and appreciated each person’s contribution. We each have been given gifts and talents by God. He expects each one of His children to use them in serving Him, in carrying out the Great Commission. [Turn to 1 Corinthians 12:12-20](#). Just like every part of the body is necessary, every Christian, every member of TBC, is important. No one is more significant than anyone else. Some may be more visible than others, but that doesn’t make them any more important. What IS important is that each person use the gift or gifts God has given him or her to serve in His army. But be warned ahead of time, just like in Paul’s and his supporters lives, serving isn’t necessarily going to be without challenges,

e.g. the need to make important decisions, the need to agonize or perhaps even to suffer as you carry out God's will. So it comes down to this, what gift and/or talent has God given you? Are you using it to serve Him or yourself or someone else? As you look at the table set before you this morning and think of what God has done for you, what is your reasonable service?