

COLOSSIANS 4:7-9 | COMMENDATIONS

VERSE 7 - BLACK

It appears that Tychicus is going to deliver the letter and update the Colossians on Paul's condition. Tychicus is mentioned in Acts 20:4, Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:12, and Titus 3:12. In most of these, he appears to be the messenger for Paul, delivering his letters.

VERSE 8 - BLACK

In addition to conveying Paul's circumstances (v. 7), Tychicus is also tasked with understanding the condition of the Colossians and providing them with comfort. It's important to recognize that the critical text—derived from a collection of manuscripts with varying ages and degrees of credibility—alters the pronoun "your" in "your estate" to "our," effectively rephrasing verses 7 and 9. While it may seem that no significant doctrine hinges on this change, it should nonetheless concern believers. One of these readings is the true Word of God, and the other is not, plain and simple. As Christians, we cannot afford to be indifferent about which text represents God's Word. This issue highlights the importance of engaging in a serious study of the differences between the Textus Receptus and the critical text. Understanding these differences is essential for defending the integrity of Scripture and ensuring that we are faithfully upholding the true Word of God. Christianity must confront the question of what the Bible truly is, and each of us has a role in that important endeavor.

VERSE 9 - BLACK

In this verse, Paul adds the name of Onesimus. From this, we learn that Onesimus is "one of you," presumably a Colossian, though he is currently in Paul's service and company. The job of Tychicus and Onesimus is to "make known unto you all things which are done here," with "here" traditionally, with strong evidence, being a reference to Rome, where Paul was imprisoned.

COLOSSIANS 4:10-14 | GREETINGS

VERSE 10 - BLACK

Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica (Acts 27:2), is referred to by Paul as "my fellowprisoner" in Colossians 4:10. This title strongly suggests that Aristarchus is Jewish, a fact that becomes evident in verse 11. The importance of his Jewishness lies in the historical context: at this time, only Jewish believers were typically imprisoned for their faith. The Gentile world, and particularly the Roman Empire, largely tolerated various religious practices, except during periods of persecution, such as under Nero after the fire of Rome in A.D. 64. (Colossians was written around A.D. 62.) Aristarchus' identity as a Jew could also be inferred by comparing this passage with Romans 16:7, where Paul refers to others as "my fellowprisoners," possibly indicating the same individuals.

Paul then mentions Marcus, the sister's son to Barnabas. We know him better as John Mark (see Acts 12:12). John Mark's Jewish heritage is also significant and ties into the discussion of verse 11.

Modern translations almost uniformly describe Marcus as Barnabas' cousin, but this is not at all incorrect. The Greek word **ἀνεψιός** (ANEPSIOS), from which we derive "nephew," is used here. Although some point out that the word "sister" does not appear in the text, this does not justify interpreting ANEPSIOS as "cousin" in the modern sense.

There are two critical points to consider:

1. The Greek term *anepsios* indeed means "nephew," specifically a sister's son.
2. The English word "cousin" today refers to the offspring of an aunt or uncle, but in Middle English and earlier, "cousin" derived from the Latin *consobrinus*, which literally meant "pertaining to the sister." Historically, "cousin" was used exclusively for a "sister's son."

Thus, there is stronger textual and etymological support for interpreting *anepsios* as "sister's son" rather than "cousin" in the contemporary sense. This interpretation is further supported by older English translations, such as the Geneva Bible, Coverdale Bible, and Bishop's Bible, all of which use "sisters sonne." The Douay-Rheims Bible uses the phrase "cousin german," reflecting a time when "cousin" still carried its original meaning of "sister's son."

This analysis serves as a reminder not to hastily dismiss the KJV translators' choices due to differences in modern word usage. A careful examination of etymology and historical usage, as well as a comparison with older translations, often clarifies such issues.

Regarding Marcus, the Colossian assembly is instructed to receive him if he comes their way. This is noteworthy, considering that Paul and John Mark once parted ways due to disagreements over ministry work (Acts 15:37-39, particularly v. 38). Now, Paul indicates that their differences have been resolved, and he endorses John Mark's presence among the Colossians.

VERSE 11 - BLACK

We are unfamiliar with Jesus, who is called Justus. The name Jesus is Hebrew. There are two men named Justus in the New Testament, first in Acts 1:23, where Barnabas is surnamed Justus, and this is unlikely the reference here since he was mentioned in the previous verse. Second, in Acts 18:7, a Jew named Justus lives next to the synagogue and Paul uses his home as a meeting place.

Paul says that these two, along with Aristarchus (vv. 10-11) "are of the circumcision," meaning they are Jews. This is crucial for understanding the next sentence, which is extremely insightful.

First, let's consider the common teaching that the Kingdom of God is "all things Christian." If this is true, then Paul must be losing his mind. He has mentioned Tychicus (v. 7) and Onesimus (v. 9), both of whom are called "faithful" (v. 7, 9), "brother" (v. 7, 9), and one even called "fellowservant" (v. 7). If the common teaching is correct, how can it be said of Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus that, "these only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God"?

If one tries to argue that "these only" includes Tychicus and Onesimus, then Paul is claiming only five workers "unto the kingdom of God." But then he goes on in the rest of the chapter to refer to Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nymphas, and Archippus.

The only "literal" understanding is that Paul literally says that he has only three "fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God." The other laborers, then, must be "unto something else." This view is rejected by much of Christianity because they have the wrong definition of the kingdom. What if they understood the kingdom as "theocratic and Davidic"? That is, the future earthly reign of the Savior on the throne of David? If the "future, physical, fraternal" understanding of the Kingdom is presumed when reading this passage, then it simply tells us that Paul "is still doing some Kingdom work," though he only has three helpers in this area. The majority of his ministry is to the "body of Christ," which we today call "the church." Since this letter was written late, we are not surprised that Paul is not involved in much Kingdom work. Israel has all but diminished. Everything we see in Paul's prison epistles gives evidence of the diminishing of Israel (Rom. 11:12), including the lack of the miraculous or any other manifestation gifts.

A few summary points to ponder:

- This verse makes the most sense when the standard church-based definition of the kingdom is rejected.

- This verse makes the most sense when an "overlap" of the kingdom ministry and the mystery ministry is assumed.
- This verse makes the most sense when one assumes that the kingdom ministry is separate from the mystery ministry and Paul was involved in both.

If the above assumptions are correct, then one must understand the two ministries to be different in content and not just different in congregation.

VERSES 12-13 - BLACK

As noted in Colossians 1:7, it is possible that Epaphras is the pastor of the church in Colossae. If so, these verses provide a beautiful example of what a pastor should embody. Epaphras is described as "one of you," indicating that he is a home-grown pastor or someone closely tied to the congregation, which is ideal for pastoral ministry. He is also called a "servant of Christ," highlighting that this is the chief role of any pastor—to serve Christ by serving His people. Furthermore, Epaphras is noted for "laboring fervently for you in prayers," emphasizing his dedication to praying for the specific purpose that the church would stand perfect and complete in the will of God.

In verse 13, Paul elaborates on Epaphras' character, stating that he has "a great zeal for you." This zeal of Epaphras extended beyond Colossae, as Paul mentions that he also had this fervor for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis. The three cities, including Colossae, formed a tri-city area in which Epaphras likely ministered, either as a "circuit rider" moving between them or as a faithful believer who regularly expressed his faith in these communities. Laodicea, best known for its condemnation in the book of Revelation, was a strong Roman city at the time, and Hierapolis, although only briefly mentioned here, was also significant in this regional network of early Christian communities.

VERSE 14 - BLACK

This is the only place in Scripture where we learn that Luke was a beloved physician. In first-century Rome, physicians were held in high regard, and medicine was more advanced than one might assume. The *DE MATERIA MEDICA*, a five-volume resource on plants and herbs with medicinal properties and their uses, was written in the first century and used for 1500 years.

Because first-century medicine was strongly associated with philosophy, it is likely that Luke was well-trained in anatomy, physiology, logic, ethics, and spiritual matters.

Luke was certainly a companion of Paul (see Philem. 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11). It is widely assumed that he was a Gentile, but Scripture makes no such claim. Here are three good reasons to consider Luke a Jew:

- Romans 3:1-2 says that the oracles of God belong to Jews. This would include Luke and Acts, a large portion of the New Testament.
- When Paul was arrested in the Temple for supposedly bringing a Gentile into the Temple (Acts 21:29-30), Trophimus was the Gentile. Acts 21:17 makes it clear that Luke was also present and presumably an eyewitness. Why would Trophimus be the only scapegoat, excluding Luke?
- Luke has a strong and personal knowledge of the Temple (Luke 1:8-20, for example). Gentiles, not being allowed in the Temple, would not be so informed.

The million-dollar question is why Paul doesn't mention Luke as one of the fellow laborers for the Kingdom in verse 11. The short answer is, "I don't know." But this shouldn't disturb our position that Jews alone were involved in Kingdom work. For example, if we took the more general and spiritualized definition of the Kingdom, as most of the Christian world does, the problem would remain: why was Luke not mentioned as a fellow worker?

With our position, we could conclude that Luke was a Gentile and thus not a Kingdom laborer. However, I think it's difficult to build a robust argument for this. A more likely scenario is that Luke was with Paul but playing a more supportive role than Aristarchus, Marcus, and Jesus called Justus.

In addition to Luke, Paul mentions Demas. Sadly, it wouldn't be long until Demas deserted Paul (2 Tim 4:10).

COLOSSIANS 4:15-18 | FINAL INSTRUCTIONS AND SALUTATIONS

VERSE 15 - BLACK

Clearly, as hinted in verses 13 and 16, there was a close connection between the believers at Colossae and the brethren in Laodicea.

Nothing is known of Nymphas except that there was a church in his house. Some manuscripts have this in the masculine (Nymphas) and others in the feminine (Nympha). As always, I prefer the received and majority text over the scholar-devised and continually-revised text.

At least three times we are told of churches meeting in houses. In addition to this verse, see Romans 16:5 and Philemon 2.

VERSE 16 - BLACK

It was customary for Paul's epistles to be read from church to church. This verse also tells us that there was a now-lost epistle to the Laodiceans. Wouldn't it be nice to know its contents? We can rest assured that God has preserved all that is needed so that we are "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3:17).

VERSE 17 - BLACK

It is possible that Archippus was the son of Philemon, who may have been from Colossae, though this remains speculative.

He is to "take heed" and "fulfill" his ministry. While the English allows a "mystical call" to ministry from this verse, the Greek is more likely a simple instruction: **YOU TOOK THIS JOB, NOW DO IT!** It can be taken with either positive or negative tones.

VERSE 18 - BLACK

Paul likely did not write these epistles himself but did add his signature at the bottom of each one. This signature would have helped verify the authenticity of the letters. Although we do not have Paul's actual signature today, our faith in the preservation of God's Word is supported by both internal testimony and extensive evidence. This evidence has demonstrated remarkable consistency over the years.

Paul closes with a prayer, beautiful in its simplicity: "Grace be with you."