

Colossians 4

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[0 : 0 0] we read together in Colossians and particularly to the last section not quite the whole section that we read but just from verse 7 the section that's entitled final greetings and I want for a little while this evening to look at this section which maybe sometimes we kind of skim over in a reading of the Bible because we think well it's just Paul saying chariot and it's not that important we don't know any of these people anyway and there's no real significance behind these sections but of course in reality we don't think that or shouldn't think that because the Holy Spirit has inspired these words and there's not a word wasted in Scripture every word that is placed in Scripture when you think of all that God could have told us and yet he's chosen to tell us what he has and give us what he's given us then we know that no words are wasted and we need to wrestle with why they are there and why they're significant why are they there?

and why are these final greetings significant? this is a great final greeting and it's almost as good as the one in Romans the Romans one is brilliant and it's even longer than this and he goes through a whole lot of people in the church in Rome you see Christ is the core of the church we know that I hope we believe that and recognize it but at the same time people are central to the church if Christ is core and people are central there's no church without people there's no church without Christ but there's no church without people and the people are the body of Christ that is the language he uses himself and sometimes somewhere along the line for some reason the church has taken on a kind of body an image and existence of its own in our minds and we separate the church from people and the church exists for itself for some strange and bizarre reason and people can be marginalized and rules and regulations and buildings can become more important than the people of God the church isn't any of these associated things the church is the people and the people met in a lady's house in Colossae and that helps us to remember what and who the church is but I want to look at this section and what's great about it is that it's a practical section that kind of explains for us or puts into practical terminology and language the outworking of principles

New Testament principles about what a Christian church should look like what Christian people should act like and think like and do and how they should serve and I hope that we can be challenged and encouraged as we think about this model or this pattern that we are given here about the church in Colossae and also some warnings that are given here about our Christian belief and our walk and our standards and what I want to know and what I want to explain in general terms is what Paul is getting across and what he one of the things and to me the central message that he gets across is the significance of deep Christian friendship he is reminding us here that he is saying farewell or he is giving a greeting to a band of brothers that he has in Christ among others in the church this is Paul's band of brothers to whom he is dependent who he loves who he is close to who are close to him there is Tychicus who I will continue to struggle to pronounce his name all evening and I hope my false teeth are in strongly because it is a terrible name to say but there is

Aristarchus and there is Epaphras and there was Dr Luke Paul had his own personal physician who went with him on his journeys who helped him and who strengthened and encouraged him and went on of course to be one of the gospel writers and these people and it is clear from this and it is clear from other parts of scripture that Paul did not have a nodding acquaintance with these men they were his band of brothers they were his friends they were his co-workers as he says my fellow workers my fellow prisoners my brothers in Christ they were loyal to Christ and in being loyal to Christ they were loyal to one another loyal to Paul as an apostle and close to him and Paul needed them Paul wasn't a maverick Paul wasn't an isolated character he wasn't a Rob Roy figure who went out and did things in his own strength

Paul had this team of people to whom he was dependent he got strength from them he got encouragement from them he was dependent on them and they passed on that encouragement and they spread that love and grace that they shared with one another Paul's band of brothers he was a prisoner he was lonely there was difficulties and struggles and yet he had these Christian friends Christian men alongside him that were a tremendous help we know it wasn't just exclusively male companionship and friends that he had as you look through the tremendous acknowledgements of the Roman letter that people men and women to whom he was indebted spiritually who upheld him in prayer to whom he had this deep love and as I mentioned this morning

[7 : 09] I think and the trouble of preaching two sermons that you haven't originally had together is that sometimes you overlap a little bit in what you say is that loneliness is very much at the root of our spiritual problems sin and rebellion separation from God and as a result loneliness being alone being alone in the world being alone in the universe and only in Christ are we drawn back into where we should be with the fellowship of God and all that goes with that and Christ when he redeems us when we are saved when our eyes are opened and when we understand what it means to be a Christian and to set our hearts to following Jesus Christ comes and he sets us in spiritual families he doesn't save us onto islands he saves us into families and into groups of people together into spiritual families with himself at the head we are saved into a body into an army into a family into a group together because it is the beginnings of what glory will be like we will not be lonely and isolated and separated and individual simply in glory we recognize we know that we are social beings part of

God created to be together with one another even Christ in his perfect human condition even though he had emptied himself of his glory as it were needed friendship chose twelve disciples of whom three were particularly close to him needing friendship where were you when I needed you the one time I absolutely needed you and I've been sweating tears sweating sweat with blood in it you've slept you've let me down and I just wanted you there I simply needed your friendship and there's always isolation in our Christian lives should always ring warning bells if we don't want to be with

Christ if we have no time for prayer if we reject his word and close the Bible and if we react against Christian company and balk at the idea of worship and church and want to be on our own and want to be isolated and want to go our own way there's always spiritual warning bells ringing because Christ has set us in homes and he has set us in families and he has brought us to be together I'm sorry but I don't believe you if you say you don't need support spiritually and love and loyalty and dedication and friendship from a band of brothers or a group of girls or families and friends in Christ it's tremendously important that we develop spiritual friendships that we work at spiritual friendships it often doesn't come naturally it's often unusual group that will gather together in a church it's not often that we will necessarily find natural soul mates but in

Christ we work through things together and we develop a band of brothers and a group spiritually to whom we are accountable and to whom we are loyal and to whom we are or that we are dependent on in our Christian lives it's not easy as I said again this morning being a Christian but God has given us one another and can I maybe encourage particularly the young people but not exclusively but you're at a stage when you're probably developing very significant friendships and I remember some very significant friendships that I developed sitting in the same pews 20 years ago in Aberdeen but these are friendships that will if you choose them carefully and prayerfully last for life and will pull you up when you're in the gutter and will strengthen and encourage you when you need it most choose your friends choose them carefully and spiritually because it's a time like this that you can choose friends that will drag you down and will be a bad influence on you don't become a group of young Christians together that sin easily together and let the standards down together that's great we can just do anything we like because we all are doing it and it's all negative and nobody seems to mind look for people who will bring you up who will be encouraging who will be spiritually uplifting that you can speak to spiritually pray to pray with spiritually because there's no limit to the influence that group will have on this church on

Scotland or wherever you happen to be Satan's central work is not out there it's in here and what he will try hardest to do is to divide and conquer and separate and bring in division and personality cliques and break up the band of brothers and the group of girls and the families and the friends that has always been his tactic and we so easily fall into the trap and we so easily are gullible and swallow all that he says to us and rub our hands about the division and the struggles and the difficulties his central work is to separate you out from Christ and separate you out from Christ's people he's a roaring lion and the roaring lion not that I'm much of an animal person but the roaring lion do you not see it on these national geographic programs romping along in the junglish kind of place and chasing its food and we'll go after a bunch of gazelles or whatever they eat and we'll run and run until one young or slow or injured gazelle breaks off from the pack and he will immediately stop chasing the pack and go after that vulnerable exposed dangerously placed animal and the spiritual application is clear and obvious he is far wiser and stronger and more subtle than we will ever be and the importance of deep

[15 : 19] Christian friendships is something that the older I get the more I value and recognize but can I just for a moment in the second place look at some of the diversity among these group of men that we can learn from and be warned from as well that we have in this list and the first person is Tychicus in verse seven who is dedicated a faithful minister and fellow servant of the Lord I am sending him to you that he may encourage your hearts and inform you about our circumstances this guy was a partner with Paul he was devoted to Jesus he was probably from Colossae yet he'd gone with Paul he came alongside Paul he was a friend of Paul's he was loyal to Paul he was a mature believer but he also went on different journeys with messages from

Paul to the fledgling churches and that was tremendous loyalty to Paul but also to Jesus Christ he maybe left his family at home and when he was going from Rome to Colossae he didn't get on the first easy jet flight and it was over in a half an hour this would take months and months of lonely dangerous walking in lonely dangerous roads and yet as loyal to Christ and loyal to his brother in Christ he recognised who Christ was and the worthiness of Christ and the importance of the work in which he was doing we should aspire to being devoted to Jesus in the same way loyal and faithful servants of Jesus ourselves in our Christian lives are we devoted to Jesus is he worth it for us will we sacrifice for him will we give up the pleasures of sin will we put him first will we value service and sacrificial service for his sake can be lonely can be difficult we can be opposed we can be struggling but is he worth it for us is he number one in our lives are we devoted and dedicated to him it's a great gift and it's tremendously significant as you go out from this place easy to be devoted in here but outside as we serve

Christ and as daily opportunities and struggles come our way is Christ the one that we hold up is he first and is he the one to whom we are devoted and loyal loyal to Jesus and that outworks itself in being loyal to one another probably one of the most precious qualities that you'll find in any group of believers any band of brothers any group of girls any family or Christian group together loyalty that we're loyal to one another that we're loyal for Christ's sake that we overlook the hurt for Christ's sake that we're compassionate and protective for Christ's sake that we close the ranks together on one another for Christ's sake that we look for the good in one another for Christ's sake and loyal to all that we can be in terms of friendship it's a great thing it's sacrificial it's expensive it's time consuming it's servile in the best sense of that word but we are asked to be loyal and dedicated and devoted to Jesus as a congregation and as individuals but I think in any congregation there's a variety of people and a variety of experiences and gifts dedication is one of them but there should also be I think in our lives individually and in our church transformation brilliant word brilliant concept transformed people people who have been and are being changed by Jesus verse 9 we were told about

Onesimus our faithful and dear brother who is one of you they will tell you everything that's happening here you know Onesimus don't you because there's a book about him just a couple of pages on Philemon his master Onesimus his slave and the book if you have time to go home tonight and read it it's wonderful because he is the slave the runaway slave who comes to Christ either under Paul's preaching or in certainly Paul's company and Paul wants to return him home to Colossae to his master Philemon and says look if he's been rubbish or if he's been hopeless or if he's stolen from you or whatever has happened put it to my account Paul says because now he's your brother he's been converted he's become a Christian and he'll be the best slave you've ever had and he'll be your brother in Christ Paul doesn't Paul doesn't even mention he'll be a slave he's a faithful and dear brother and he's been transformed from being a runaway slave and he's returning to

Colossae's home a completely new person with purpose direction a different attitude he's serving a different master and yet the master on earth he will serve he will serve well because he's now his brother and I think every church and every community of believers and in our individual lives we should be looking for transformation Onesimus was transformed and we should be looking for new people who are transformed by Jesus and by his grace who are meeting with Christ and who are being born anew who are given a whole new perspective see we had a strategy yesterday in St.

[21 : 36] Columbus and I've been thinking about strategy for ages and we always talk and think a lot and sometimes maybe we don't act very much but if you're talking about a vision statement for the church or anything trendy and modern like that you maybe have all kinds of ideas but the great commission sees it all and I keep going back I can't think of a better vision statement that we are making go and make disciples in the name of the father the son and the holy spirit teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you that says it all that says everything about our purpose as a church making disciples and that's not just a magical thing that happens one day they're converted great they're in we've got another member of the church let them just go on their own way making disciples is lifelong and it's an ongoing transformation and if you think you're made as a Christian then you're undone the making is lifelong the conversion is instantaneous but the transformation goes on forever and as

Christians and in a group of Christians that are accountable to one another and in the church there should be this ongoing transformation we should be able to say once a year or once a month or every communion have I grown have I been am I being transformed since last I professed his name and sat with his people is anyone asking about your spiritual life are you asking about anyone else's spiritual life are you close enough to people that you can challenge them and encourage them and warn them and bring them to a closer walk with Jesus our aim our purpose our raison d'etre is making disciples making children disciples making grown ups disciples followers of Jesus and it's we never retire from that we never have arrived until the day he calls us home and has perfected us for his kingdom again kind of similarly to this morning taking Jesus into your life is a holy upheaval and it doesn't just stop when you're converted it only starts it's only the beginning we are new born and we grow all our lives there's new morals new ethics new attitudes to work new attitudes to masters new attitudes to colleagues new attitudes to brothers and sisters to ministers to elders there's something crucially wrong in our lives if we are static if there is no evidence of transformation and it's a great encouragement too to have actually people being transformed not just as

Christians but people coming and confessing Christ there's nothing better in a church it's not what we look for in the sense that that's our only aim because we need to disciple and we need to encourage one another and we need to worship but it's a great thing to hear of God condescending in work among us with all our foibles and mistakes and faults and errors it's wonderful transformed people but there's also in any group of Christians together and in any individual Christian life and in any church there should be if this is a microcosm of the church restored people my fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you greetings as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas you've received instructions but if he comes to you welcome him I praise God for John Mark and for his being mentioned here in the final greetings to the church in

Colossae because he's restored he's a Christian who let down his brothers he was on the missionary journey with Paul and with Barnabas we're told about in Acts 13 verse 13 and the going got tough but Mark didn't get going because he wasn't tough spiritually and he walked away and abandoned them in the midst of the work and legged it back to Jerusalem and it was a cause of great hurt and heartache Barnabas his cousin and Paul argued about having him back again Paul couldn't have him back again in the next journey because he just didn't think he was reliable and it caused a vision so Paul and Barnabas split up but obviously there was healing there was restoration we know all about that don't we we know all about division and splitting and everything that goes with it but praise

God for restoration and praise God for John Mark he's restored welcome him Paul says he becomes an author of the gospel isn't that great if we had chosen who to write the gospels would we choose Mark who abandoned the work maybe not Paul reminds us that the church of Christ is not a one chance saloon but is a place for restored failures and for new beginnings and we ask ourselves if we recognize that in our own lives the constant need for restoration the open arms of Jesus Christ to take us back and as it should be the open arms of his body his people to take us back as well isn't it and hasn't it been in the past so often the church the face of the church the attitude in the mind of the church is unforgiving and harsh and it's the hardest place for a restored believer to come it's the last step in the journey because they find it a judgmental and difficult and harsh and cold place to be the last place for failures

[28:10] I can't go back to church everyone's so together there everyone's strong in their faith everyone is seems to have no difficulties and no trials and no problems they wouldn't understand me they wouldn't accept my failure and my weakness and my lack of courage and my abandonment of Christ but every band of brothers and group of girls in Christ and family and church should be a place of restoration and an open place where grace reigns this church should be a place that absorbs failures like a sponge restorative understanding and you are here and I am here because we need Christ and because we need forgiveness and because we need restoration and because we need hope and because we are weak and often empty and often struggling this should never be a church with a sin bin and an exclusion zone or an elephant's memory we should have constantly a sense of need a sense of dependence on Christ it should be a come back to church

Christ wouldn't that be great I've heard of churches that if I'd come back to church Sundays maybe they've called it come back to church but I suppose what they meant is come back to Christ that's good isn't it I wonder if anyone would come back we advertise throughout the city of Aberdeen or in my case the city of Edinburgh come back to Christ or come back to church Sunday it's a great idea isn't it restoration new beginning hope for failures but we also see that among this band of brothers was Epaphras and Epaphras in verse 12 we're told was wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God mature and fully assured Epaphras was very possibly the founder of the church in

Colossae he was from Colossae he was probably the pastor in Colossae he'd gone to meet with Paul to tell Paul about the church and what was happening and he had this agonizing concern in prayer agonizing that's the word in the original the word that we get agonizing from he was wrestling in prayer for the people in Colossae mature intelligent well thought out prayer he knew what he was praying that they would be knowing the will of God mature and fully assured what do we pray for for one another what do we pray for for the church do we know what to pray for have we studied what to pray for Paul has seven or eight specific prayers for the church in his letters and if we did well to go through them on a yearly basis you would be able to pray them a lot in a year one prayer each day they're great prayers he knew what he wanted for the church do we know what we want for the church do we know what we want for one another do we know what's significant in God's eyes for what we should pray for spiritually for one another he was a praying founder preacher of that church and he agonized in prayer it wasn't easy prayer is never easy again sorry for boring you with what's happening we're doing or not doing but we recognize the need for more prayer but how can we encourage our people to pray more because we're encouraging them to agonize you know it's not come on skip down to the front and we'll have an hour of prayer cheesy peasy lemon squeezy you'll do it no problem and you'll all love to do it you don't want to do anything else you'll not want to go to the cinema instead or stay at home or have cheese toasties you'll want to be here and pray that's not the case is it because we don't want to pray because it's a struggle it's agonizing it's work it's hard effort and yet this is the concern of somebody in Christ it's our greatest need and I know in the past we've used that as an excuse for not doing anything more but I'm praying and praying is very important but if we're truly praying it will also involve a voluminous desire to serve and to follow but genuine wrestling agonizing in prayer for one another would we be able to would I be able to agonize in prayer for my band of brothers do I know what they're struggling with do I know how near they are to abandonment of the faith do I know the struggles they're having in relationships and their understanding of the Old

Testament in their day to day living that we are praying for one another praying people great challenge and encouragement to us and I want to close with a it's probably not a good thing to do close with a warning because Demas is mentioned here as well in verse 14 our friend dear Luke the doctor and Demas send greetings there's nothing much said here about Demas but we know from 2nd Timothy chapter 4 that he abandoned the work of the gospel and we're told there because he loved the world more he deserted Christ he deserted the band of brothers deserted the church because he loved the world more it's that simple choice Christ or the world and he just loved the world more we're not told anything about whether he returned or came back

I suspect possibly he didn't but there is always isn't there a warning being among God's people or having made a profession once that we leave it there and we forget that daily we make choices do I love Christ or do I love the world and if we keep choosing the world one day our whole mind and heart and soul will be sold there to who and to what we love more as long as we are here we're in our battle we're not yet at the table the feasting table it remains a battle and the battle is not against Islam it's not against secularism and atheism they're all secondary somewhere down the line the first battle is in your heart and in mine against the secularism and the atheism there that's where the battle is that's where preachers fall and mature

[36 : 11] Christians fall and where strong believers fall it's not what's happening out there it's what's not happening in here it's because we've abandoned or ignored our hearts and we've loved the world and we've forgotten that there's sin that needs to be dealt with in our soul and we've forgotten that person the Holy Spirit so we find it easy to grieve him and quench him and destroy his work in our hearts so the warning is you know Demas we sometimes say one saved always saved kind of a dangerous half truth in a sense it's true of course but if we have that attitude we might be in a very dangerous place relying on maybe what happened 20 years ago 10 years ago 1 year ago because we have a daily walk with

Christ to consider and we have to watch our heart guard the wellspring of your heart your loves what matters to you who you put first where Jesus is watch it guard it nobody else can do it for you and if you love the world and abandon Christ that is your choice but know that sooner or later there will be heartache and there will be gravel in your stomach it might be sweet to the taste but it will be gravel in your stomach one day choose Christ choose life and be warned you know because Jesus gives us these people so that we don't need to make the same mistakes they made by his grace and may we be encouraged to deep

Christian friendships stemming from our own walk with Christ and look and learn from and attain to some of the characteristics that are mentioned here in our own church in our own band of brothers group of girls families and friends in our congregation in our heart amen we'll bow our heads briefly and pray together lord god we thank you for your word and we thank you for the final greetings given to us in paul's letter to the church in colossi we thank you that we do not follow a philosophy or a religion or simply a set of truths but we recognize that we fall at the feet of the word who became flesh and we thank you for that and we pray that you would guard our relationship and that you would remind us that as we go from here as we separate tonight from our

Christian friends and as we recognize how important they are and we thank you for them tonight we recognize that ultimately we stand in the mirror of our soul before God alone and there can be no hypocrisy that he doesn't see and there is no trouble that he doesn't understand and there is no doubt that he cannot assuage and there is no fear that he cannot deal with in our lives give us honesty and openness and care over our souls and help us to lean on Christ and on one another and be leaned on help us to be part of the body of Christ with all our gifts and all our talents and our few gifts and our few talents help us to love and to be loved to be loyal and dedicated and prayerful and concerned transformed and restored and above all may our life and Christ be real together and alone we do pray for your blessing on this congregation we thank you for the encouragement of being among them for the encouragement of the way they are united and strong because they know why they exist and even though they haven't a pastor that they are committed to Jesus may they be strong continually grant them wisdom and strength bless the elders and the deacons bless every member of the congregation every part of the body of Christ here bless their brothers and sisters in the Christian churches of this city we pray that they would be a banner filled with grace and love and portraying

Christ in all his beauty to a lost and lonely and fallen world and we pray Lord God that you would remember us as a people remember us as a denomination remember us as Christians in this country where we are beleaguered and silenced or at least ignored and seen as irrelevant and hopeless Lord we know we don't need to bang louder to be heard we know we simply need to reflect Christ and influence with that salt and light his way which will be miraculous so bless us we pray and guide us bind up the broken hearts Lord God those who today are struggling with their faith who find their way difficult who maybe are a bit bitter about the way they feel they've been treated in the church or with other

[43 : 02] Christians who feel like giving up on the body of Christ and we pray that you would forgive us and forgive them and heal them we pray we pray for those who would love to cry out for help but who don't feel that anyone would listen give them the confidence to rely and depend on others in such a way that there's trust and unity and support and help give us Lord God we pray sacrificial living and hearing ears help us to be more and more like you in a world that is less and less like you for Jesus sake Amen