

# NOTES FROM STEVEN DRIVER'S SERMON July 23<sup>rd</sup> am

## Series in Colossians "Rooted and built up in Christ" Pt 12 (Final Part)

### "The fullness of fellowship"

Text: Colossians 4 verses 4-18

Scripture references from the ESV

**Colossians 4:7-4:18** Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant<sup>[b]</sup> in the Lord. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup> and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

<sup>10</sup> Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

<sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.

<sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers<sup>[c]</sup> at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. <sup>16</sup> And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. <sup>17</sup> And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

This last passage in Colossians might seem to be not much more than a list of names, but it is God-breathed scripture and it is included for the benefit of the early church and for us today. It is a powerful example of something that, in our culture, we really need to hear and put into practice, hard though that may be to do.

**It shows the vast spiritual importance of Christian friendship.**

Ask yourself the question: with whom, apart from your spouse, do you have a meaningful friendship?

Sadly, for many in our country, the answer is no one.

Generation Z (those born after 1999) are regularly described as the loneliest generation. Starting and maintaining relationships is a greater struggle for them than for any previous generation, and Generation Alpha (the Covid generation)

are likely to find it harder still. They are the most connected (through technology) and the least able to connect.

We live in an area with a high proportion of retired people, many of whom have lost their partners and are isolated.

Being in a busy place, such as a church with lots of people, doesn't make you less alone – many people feel the reality of their loneliness more. Church might be the one time in a week that they meet people face-to-face.

- We live in a culture of vast loneliness on all levels. It is not age specific.

You might be concerned that when your spouse goes to be with the Lord, you will be left alone. Your children are perhaps grown up and now live far away. The importance of friendship, whether or not you are single, cannot be underestimated. We are not designed to be isolated and nor is your spouse meant to be your only friend.

- As Christians, we should be leading examples of deep, meaningful Christ-centred fellowship in different forms and to such a depth that others will notice.

Throughout Colossians, we have seen that it is by the magnificent work of Christ that we are brought into the kingdom community – a worldwide eternal kingdom community.

Through Christ, all of us are in him and he in us. Through Christ:

- We have been knit together in love - **that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love (2:2)**
- We are called to help one another grow as members of one body - **indeed you were called in one body (3:15)**

To go against this is to go against God's provision for us.

**The church has been provided for us as a place for unified delight in Christ.**

At the end of his letter, we see that this has been expressed for Paul though deep, meaningful Christ-centred fellowship:

**through brotherhood, through co-working and through mutual encouragement.**

1. **Through brotherhood (vv7-9).** We can learn more about Tychicus and Onesimus elsewhere in the Bible.

**Tychicus** probably joined Paul in Ephesus, and experienced many of the same dangers as Paul. He had been shipwrecked with him; he was with Paul when he spoke to kings and governors; he sat with Paul while the latter was in prison.

- He is Paul's beloved brother, someone Paul can depend on to be there, to have his back and one who could be entrusted with the vital work of passing on these letters to the churches.

**Onesimus**, described in Philemon as useless and ungrateful, has been transformed and Paul now calls him a **faithful beloved brother**.

**Tychicus, Onesimus and Paul share in everything.**

**They are experiencing deep, meaningful Christ-centred fellowship because they are a brotherhood.**

They are open to sharing deeply with one another, going to the hard places in the practicalities of life, and working on each other's souls. They confess their sins to one another, pray for healing and build up and support each other. They are not judging each other but speaking Christ into their hearts. That is what a brotherhood or sisterhood in Christ looks like. James 5:16 puts it like this:

**Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.**

Jesus had a brotherhood. Of course, he did not need to confess sin, but he was profoundly close with the 12 disciples, and closer still with Peter, James and John. Within that, we read that John was the disciple that Jesus loved. Jesus' brotherhood shared their lives together. Paul is following Jesus' example.

We are not good at sharing deeply with one another, confessing our darkest sins and praying for one another. We know that there are things locked inside us that we don't want to share with anyone. We do not want to take our masks off, because it is humiliating to admit what is going inside us, but we are called to do that and to be that for one another.

- Confession is our breakthrough to experiencing real brotherhood.
- However, sin wants to keep a man by himself, withdrawn and alone.
- The more isolated a man is, the more destructive his sin becomes
- By confessions, the light of the gospel can shine into his dark places.
- And when a man finally surrenders and opens up, his sin starts weakening.

- The man receiving a brother's confession starts bearing his sin with him
- Now both men are honest sinners, in deep brotherhood
- A man living in ongoing confession will never be alone again. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Life Together)

What we need to grasp is:

**If we want to start experiencing Christ-centred fellowship, where our identity is wrapped up in Christ**

**and not how people see us, we should seek to develop close brotherhoods and sisterhoods within our church.**

- Perhaps you could think of one person in this church with whom you could do this and arrange to meet up

**We can be impressive or we can be known, but we can't be both**

**2. Through co-working (vv10-14)** These verses show the ministry team with whom Paul is in close fellowship. They are mixture of people from different backgrounds and at different stages of maturity in their faith, some of whom have had serious fallings out with Paul. Mark had once abandoned Paul, but now ministers alongside him.

**It is a group that crosses racial barriers and transcends grievances**

No one would choose to put these men together, but they have a close bond that is brought about through their co-working in Christ. They are not just a fellowship in name – they are a fellowship in nature, fused together in Christ for his glory. That had the potential for heartache, as with Mark, though he was restored, and that is what happened with Demas who eventually abandoned Paul.

**We too should strive to be a fellowship not just in name but in nature**

That means we all have a role to play in serving and taking part in the mission of this church, particularly if you are a member. That mission is to go and make disciples, to know Jesus and make him known.

- We are not meant to do this alone; we have been brought together to share Jesus.
- The promise is that when we do, we will no longer be in fellowship in name only, but be in full fellowship

The Holiday Club that many took part in earlier this year was a great example of a group of people serving together, seeing each other stressed and praying together! **Our church should be a place where we are serving one another, ministering together**

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**being co-workers in Christ together.**

There are many in the church who are not serving in any area of ministry. This is a source of grief, not so much because it means there are gaps on the rotas, but because those who are not serving are missing out on the reality of fellowship. Even if you are not physically able to serve, you can at least commit to praying for the work of the fellowship. You can ring people and ask how you can pray for them, and then actually pray for them! That is one of the most important roles anyone can play in the fellowship.

If you are not a member, then please consider membership. It is a sign that you are committed to the fellowship here, and are not just attending on a Sunday. It signals that you want to know, be known and make known the 'in Christness' that defines our fellowship.

**Membership is a symbol of your commitment to us and our commitment to you.**

**3. Through mutual encouragement (vv15-18)** The fellowship of Christ is not bound just to our local church. We are to encourage the whole church of Christ to flourish in him. Paul wants to encourage not just the church in Colossae, but all the churches. That includes us! Since Paul is writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can say that through the time we have spent in Colossians, God's heart has been to encourage us to keep going and to be rooting ourselves in him.

**God's heart for us is that we should be encouraged.**

**We need to join in with this work and encourage one another.**

Encouraging one another applies not just here at BBC, but also to the worldwide church. We have a calling to encourage all believers to keep going and rooting themselves in Christ so that they are built up.

- We do this through prayer, through sharing resources and hospitality. There are endless ways we can encourage one another.

- That is why we have mission partners, and why we are part of FIEC.
- That is why our pastor and assistant pastor preach at other churches, and why we invite preachers from other churches to preach here
- It is why gatherings like Bournemouth Bible Week, Keswick Convention and Word Alive are important

### **It is for mutual encouragement**

We have been given so much in our fellowship together with Christ, from one extreme of intimate brotherhood to the other extreme of participating in mutual encouragement of the worldwide church.

### **What a glorious outworking of the Gospel we get to participate in.**

To go back to where we started – if you feel alone and as if you don't belong: Christ loves you, dear child. You are not alone and have never been alone. He gives you this church right now, in this time to be a means by which you can know him more for yourself. Don't be scared. We know you are afraid to take the plunge here. Commit yourself, and open yourself up to this church. We know you are not perfect. Neither are we.

**Come in and let us mutually build one another up in Christ.**