

Paul's Signature and Benediction

Colossians 4:15-18

Colossians 4:15-18 - *"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house. ¹⁶ Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.' ¹⁸ This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen."*

Background Notes

Christians met in homes until the Roman persecutions ended, so there were no church buildings until the 4th century AD. We know the church at Colossae met in Philemon's home. Other home churches are mentioned in Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 16.

Church groups met in Aquila and Priscilla's home. Priscilla and Aquila moved around quite a bit - we read of them in Corinth, in Ephesus, and in Rome. It seems that wherever they went, this godly couple established a church in their home! They're a great example for Christians today – fully committed to the Lord and to the Body of Christ.

Now here in verse 15, we have Nympha, or Nymphas, and another home church. The church that is in Nympha's or Nymphas' home was probably in Laodicea. (Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis formed a tri-city area.) Some translations have the name "Nympha" rather than "Nymphas." There is a question whether the name should be male (Nymphas) or female (Nympha). Whether it was Nymphas or Nympha, this godly believer opened his or her home so that the church could meet there.

By the way, I wonder how many lamps got broken or how many pieces of furniture got scratched in those home churches, with all the people crowding in? I'm sure there was some property damage from church meetings in those homes.

Question: are you willing to open up your home for the Lord, even if it involves some property damage?

A second background note comes from verse 16: *"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."* What are the letters that are mentioned here? About the letter to the Colossians, Paul said, *"see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans."* So after the letter was read in the church at Colossae, the Colossian believers either sent on the actual letter to the Laodicean church, or sent a copy of it.

If they made a copy of the letter, they wouldn't have used a photocopier! It would have been copied by hand, and therefore it would be a *manuscript*. Biblical manuscripts are the handwritten copies of Scriptures that were made before the invention of the printing press. So if the Colossians made a copy of this letter and sent it on to the believers at Laodicea, it would be the earliest manuscript copy of the Epistle to the Colossians.

Unfortunately, the believers at Laodicea did not follow the major theme of Colossians. They didn't keep "Christ supreme and all-sufficient" in their lives. In Revelation 3, the church in Laodicea was described as "lukewarm." The Lord said to them, "*Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*" The church of Laodicea was removed. What a warning for us!

What about the "letter from Laodicea" that is mentioned at the end of verse 16? It may have been a special letter that Paul wrote to the believers in Laodicea that was not an inspired letter, and thus it is not part of the New Testament writings.

However, most likely this "epistle from Laodicea" was actually the Epistle to the Ephesians. It appears that Ephesians was meant to be a circular letter, so it would have been read in all the churches in that entire area. Tychicus, who carried that letter, would have delivered it to the church at Ephesus, and then it was sent on to the believers in Laodicea, and then finally came to the church at Colossae.

Who was Archippus, who was to "*take heed to the ministry*"? He was probably a son of Philemon. The greeting of the letter to Philemon includes "*the beloved Appia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.*" So the letter to Philemon was addressed not only to Philemon, but also to Appia (probably his wife) and to Archippus, who was probably Philemon's son.

Archippus was not addressed directly here. Why not? We don't know. Maybe he was out of town, or maybe he was becoming distracted or lazy, but it appears that he was not fulfilling his ministry. On the other hand, perhaps this was just Paul's way of putting his stamp of approval on the ministry of Archippus, letting the church of Colossae know that he approved of Archippus and whatever the ministry was that the Lord had given him.

Doctrinal Point

Every Christian is given a ministry to fulfill.

Archippus was told to fulfill his ministry, and the Bible is teaching us that we're to do the same. In the last letter Paul wrote, he told Timothy to fulfill his ministry: "*You be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry*" (2 Timothy 4:5). You have a ministry to fulfill and I have a ministry to fulfill. Every Christian has a ministry to fulfill.

Your “ministry” is not the same as your “spiritual gift” (or gifts). Your ministry is the sphere of service where you use your gifts. 1 Corinthians 12, a great spiritual gift passage says: “*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord*” (v4-5). There is a distinction made between “spiritual gifts” and “ministries.”

Everyone has at least one spiritual gift. 1 Peter 4:10 says that everyone is to use his or her gift: “*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*” And everyone has a ministry where their gift is to be used.

Maybe your ministry is primarily in the home with your family. Maybe your ministry is in your local church. Maybe your ministry is wider in scope. Ministries can change, and Christians can be involved in several ministries. If you’re a student, you may be involved in a camp ministry in the summer and a campus ministry in the winter. You may be involved in a teen ministry as well as a ministry to “shut-ins.” You may have a writing ministry and/or a music ministry. In any case, our responsibility is to get involved!

We should discover our spiritual gifts, and then begin to use them in our sphere of ministry. The rest of the Body should give us guidance here, to help us find our area of service. We should help one another to discover and develop our spiritual gifts, and to discover our spheres of ministry. Every Christian is given a ministry to fulfill.

Practical Application

Fulfill your ministry!

In Paul’s final letter, written right before he was martyred, he told Timothy to make sure that he fulfilled his ministry. Then Paul said, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*”(2 Timothy 4:7). Paul had fulfilled his ministry.

Suppose the Lord told you that you were going to die tomorrow. If you’re a believer, you’ll be going to Heaven - but when you meet the Lord could you say that you have fought the good fight, and finished the course He laid out for you? Could you say that you have fulfilled your ministry? Or would you have to say that even though the Lord gave you time and opportunities, you did not fulfill the ministry He gave you? Paul was able to say that had fulfilled his ministry. He’s a great model for us! Fulfilling our ministry is certainly part of making Christ supreme and all-sufficient in our lives.

As Paul came to the end of his letter to the Colossians, he said that he was signing the letter “with his own hand.” Remember, Paul used secretaries - maybe because of his chains - but he signed the letter in his own hand to show it was not a forgery.

Paul did make one final request: *“Remember my chains.”* This wasn’t a plea for sympathy - just a request that they would remember him. We should care for one another, especially those who are in painful and distressing circumstances, and remember one another in prayer as well.

Finally, the benediction: *“Grace be with you. Amen.”* Paul began the epistle with grace in his greeting, and he ended it with grace. Between these two “graces,” he unfolded the great theme of Colossians: **the supremacy and the all-sufficiency of Christ!**