

Held Together:
The Perseverance that Holds It All Together
Colossians 4:17

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Text Introduction: We are working our way through the book of Colossians. A key phrase of Colossians comes in Colossians 1:17, “And by Him all things hold together.” I love this phrase. This phrase speaks to the preeminence of Jesus. He is all things. If He is all things, He must be first place in my life.

We have now moved on to the application section of this letter. I want to draw our attention to just one verse of Scripture—4:17.

Now, you might notice that we appear to be skipping a major passage. We are actually coming back to that passage next week. As we did last week with 3:15, we are considering mainly just one verse this week.

The one verse is 4:17, but I want to read most of the fourth chapter. You will notice it to be a closing section of mainly personal remarks to specific people in the church of Colossae.

Text: Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah, for which I am in prison, ⁴so that I may reveal it as I am required to speak. ⁵Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

⁷Tychicus, our dearly loved brother, faithful servant, and fellow slave in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and so that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹He is with Onesimus, a faithful and dearly loved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

¹⁰Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, as does Mark, Barnabas’s cousin (concerning whom you have received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹and so does Jesus who is called Justus. These alone of the circumcision are my coworkers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always contending for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. ¹³For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke, the dearly loved physician, and Demas greet you. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home. ¹⁶When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷And tell Archippus, “Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it.”

¹⁸This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

Introduction: I have always been intrigued by this verse. The phrase “inquiring minds want to know” comes to mind. The truth is we don’t really know much about Archippus. We get this one line here and from Philemon v. 2 we know that he is a “fellow soldier” with Paul and has a relationship with Philemon. (Some have suggested he was Philemon’s son. John Knox, the reformer, was famous for an advanced theory that he was actually the slave owner of Onesimus.) Not only do we not know who he is, we don’t know what he was supposed to be doing. That is, we don’t know the ministry he was being asked to fulfill.

With these uncertainties, it is almost risky to venture to preach from this obscure verse.

What intrigues me though is why is it that he is brought up here at the end and why is it that the church is being directed to tell him.

Can you imagine the scene? Getting a letter from the Apostle was a pretty big deal. We have 13 known and preserved letters from the Apostle Paul in our New Testaments. I can imagine the church gathering for worship. Word has spread that the letter will be read in the worship gathering. As the letter was being read for the first time ever, think about some of the grand themes we have discovered—the pre-eminence of Jesus above all things, warnings against departing from the faith, the application of this high view of Jesus, and the list of things that should not be part of a Christian’s life and the list of things that should be. Then, we have heard the praise directed toward some—Tychicus—faithful servant, Onesimus—faithful and loved brother, and there are others. (All these known by the church it appears)

And then....Archippus. Was he there? Did he hear his name?

Though multiple questions obscure the specifics of the situation, the word to Archippus is a needed reminder to persevere to that which God has called us. Why the call to perseverance?

Your Ministry is urgent!

We could translate this verse quite literally, “See to it.” (as the NIV does) The idea is to take action to the ministry you have been assigned. There is an urgency expressed here.

Everything that God assigns is urgent. People will say this is urgent. Everything is urgent when God is the one who assigns. People will say, “We live in urgent times.” These are urgent times because they are the only times we have.

While I don’t know the ministry of Archippus, I do know the task of the church. The task of the church is to preach the Gospel to the nations. The task of the church is urgent so we must “see to it” that it gets done. We must pay attention to the task. We must urge each other on to fulfill that task.

We must pray about that task. We must teach about that task. We must train one another for the task. We must give toward that task. We must go for that task. It is urgent!

Your Ministry is unique!

- “to the ministry you have received in the Lord”—so your ministry is personal

John Maxwell has said, “The church ought to be different people with different backgrounds using different gifts at different times in different places to meet different needs.”

In order for this to happen, **you** are going to have to fulfill **your** ministry.

- “to the ministry you have received in the Lord”—so your ministry is perfect

You have received your ministry. This is a gift. It is a perfect gift.

Years ago in writing material to accompany the church-wide study for *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren put this idea of our calling into the acrostic SHAPE. That is God gives us a ministry according to our...

Spiritual Gifts
Heart—or passion
Abilities
Personality
Experiences

- “to the ministry you have received in the Lord”—so your ministry is empowered

You know how the saying goes, “God does not call the equipped; He equips the called.”

Your ministry is unfulfilled!

At first glance we might think Archippus is being scolded. That might not be the case. In fact, I think it is not the case. What is the case is that he is being encouraged to keep on fulfilling his ministry.

Remember what we learned earlier in this letter about ministry. The goal of ministry is to present everyone mature in Christ.

You perhaps will be traveling soon. You will get that most famous question, “Are we there yet?” In ministry, we are never there yet, so we are called to keep on fulfilling the ministry to which we have been called.

Thus, we have a call to persevere. Perseverance is such a good thing. It keeps us out of trouble.

So What?

Nothing can distract us from fulfilling our ministry. Success cannot. There is more to do. Difficulty cannot. Paul wrote from prison but he is still fulfilling his ministry.

Have you become distracted? Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord so that you can accomplish it.