

# Paul's Fellers

Colossians 4:7–18

Bro Ricky Cunningham

This morning we are going to finish our several months study of the book of Colossians. We're going to try to read all 12 verses. Please pay attention to what Paul says in what's considered his conclusion, his greeting to the church as he closes his letter.

## Scripture

***"Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 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. 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), 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. 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. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 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.***

***And say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.' I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."***

As you look at the title of the sermon this morning, I want you to remember that I was raised in Dexter, well, in the suburbs of Dexter but I am proud to be from Dexter. Now I remember being a little kid raised out in the country. I think I am the epitome of a redneck (hopefully a little preppy at times), but I'm proud of my culture, proud of my family, proud of who I am. We didn't always speak the king's English correctly. I'll never forget growing up as a little kid and being with some of my friends, which was normally my cousins, and some of us male cousins would be together and we'd be doing something really neat, all of a sudden an adult would walk up and the adult would look at us and say, "What are you fellers doing?" Now you have to understand that it was a long time before I really understood that fellers isn't really an English word. It's a West Kentucky word. It's not really spelled F-E-L-L-E-R-S, it's spelled F-E-L-L-O-W-S.

Three times in this passage, Paul talks about his fellows...so if you don't mind, I'm going to title the sermon this way this morning...Paul's Fellers. Now I'm aware that's not correct, according to the king's English. For see, later when I did get educated in a more formal setting, like at Faxon and then at Calloway, and especially at college, I would hear people talk about fellows. They weren't talking about fellers like I knew fellers, they were talking about somebody who was academically a fellow. Someone who was medically a fellow, someone who because of their skill, because of an achievement, because of their education, they were now in a subcategory or a special study where they're doing research. Then they would come back after the research and they would teach, and they were proud to be a fellow of a certain institution. So I know what a fellow is but I also know what a feller is, and we're just going to walk through these men that Paul mentions because they're dear to him, they're close to him. After lofting us off of the earth into the heavens and talking about our oneness and our completeness in Christ, when Paul comes back down to the earth, he

wants the church at Colossae to know who his fellers are because he understands that as an apostle, he would not have the ministry he has if it was not for these fellers in his life. I can identify with Paul just a little bit, not as an apostle but as a pastor who's been with you a little over 42 years now. I got some fellers here. I could literally start pointing and naming names, male and female, of people who I know I would've never had the ministry I've had here as a pastor without some fellers. I want to ask you this morning, are you a feller?

Listen to how Paul describes the fellers in his life. He starts with a guy named Tychicus. Now we meet Tychicus back in Acts 20. We know he became a companion of the Apostle Paul in traveling wherever he traveled sharing the gospel. Now we see as Paul concludes this letter he is getting ready to send Tychicus back to the church, possibly with this very letter in his hand as he did the letter to the church at Ephesus. Because when you read chapter 6 of Ephesus verse 21, it's almost identical...Paul telling the church there that he's sending Tychicus to you to tell you how I'm doing and to encourage. Now notice how Paul describes Tychicus. He first calls him a beloved brother, then he calls him a faithful minister, and then a fellow servant in the Lord. Now you and I know that Paul and Tychicus weren't physical brothers, but they were spiritual brothers. I grew up in a home where I didn't have a brother. I had a sister. I love my sister. We were close, but man, I had some friends who had some brothers and there's just something about having a brother. There's something about having someone who you're just one with, knowing that you got the same mama and you got the same daddy and there's just some commonality about you. I love that when the Apostle Paul describes Tychicus he calls him a beloved brother. You realize this right...we're family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have the same Father. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, has been applied to us and we've not only been adopted in the family, we've been born again into the family of God, and we are brothers. We have a commonality together.

Now Paul didn't just call him a brother, he called him a beloved brother. He loved this guy. Their life was intertwined. This wasn't a friend that he wanted to hang out with so that when he had a need, that friend would meet his need. No, this was a brother who he loved. He was looking at ways to meet that brother's need and he would give of himself to meet that need. They were in a special relationship. Man, I hope you have those relationships.

Then he calls him a faithful minister. Faithful, loyal, you could count on him, you could depend on him, he would always do what he was supposed to do. He was a minister. Now I love this word, minister, because it's where we get our Baptist word deacon from, and I praise the Lord for deacons. I really do. As a matter of fact, when we have a deacons meeting here at Hardin, the guys know this, I look at them and call them what they're described as in the Bible because this word deacon, *diakonos*, literally means to be a dirty-footed one. And then they're supposed to look at me and call me the beautiful-footed one, because I preach the gospel and "how beautiful our the feet of those who preaches the gospel." But the deacons, they don't have beautiful feet, they got dirty feet. See in the biblical world, the way you could tell a deacon, the way you could tell a minister, was they didn't wear shoes, so when it was dry season their feet would be dusty. When it was rainy season, their feet would be muddy. It is not talking about somebody sitting in an office studying. It's talking about someone who rolls up their britches leg, rolls up their sleeves, and they get dirty serving others.

I will never forget years ago when God drove this illustration home to me. I had just finished the sermon and I was standing out on the front porch at the old downtown location. I was shaking hands and you know how everybody does, they tell you what a good sermon you preach. I'm preaching this sermon, and all of a sudden I see this lady coming back across the road from the parking lot. She waited until everybody came out and then she came up to me. Now here I am, I had a three piece Mama bought suit on, and I was looking good if I can say that. This lady comes

up the steps and she says, "Bro Ricky, I got a flat tire." Everybody else was gone and I didn't say this but I looked at myself and I thought...*How am I going to change her tire?* Now I know how to change a tire, but how am I going to change a tire with a Mama bought suit on without getting what's on that tire on me and ruin this suit? About that time, I'm telling the truth, around the corner came a guy named Tim Cox. When Tim went to work during the week he had to wear a suit and tie, but on Sunday he never wore a suit and tie to church. He just came with some old jeans on, a shirt untucked, had his hair wadded up in a ponytail in the back. As he came around the corner, he heard what the lady was saying to me, and Tim just immediately says, "Bro Ricky, you stay right there. You got that Mama bought suit on you can't change the tire, but look at me, I got jeans on so I'll go change the tire." Well, I didn't stand there. I walked with Tim across the parking lot and I watched Tim change her tire. She drove away and Tim grinned and shook my hand. As I was walking back to my truck, it was as if the Spirit of God said to me...*Do you know what we need? We need more Christians in blue jeans who don't care to get dirty than Christians in three piece suits. Amen!*

Tychicus had a ministry where he rubbed elbows with people. Life got messy, and he was faithful to minister to people with the spiritual enabling that God gave him. And Paul considered him a fellow servant. You say hold on Bro Ricky, you've just described a servant. I know, but this is a different word. This is not the word that you used for servants to mean you roll up your britches legs and you get dirty, or you put that apron on like my granny did. We would get so tickled because granny put that apron on because we knew she's going to fix something really good for us kids. It's not the picture...it's not a diakonos, it's a doulos, a bond servant. See, Paul's now not on his horse of being an apostle who's sending out Tychicus to carry this letter to the church. He looks at Tychicus as a feller bond servant. They're the same, they're equal. And they serve God, they serve the church because they've been bought and they're not their own. They've been paid for and they belong to another. How you fellers doing?

You're a brother, you're a minister, you're a doulos of God with the Apostle Paul.

Paul says I have this reason why I'm sending him to you. I want you to know everything going on in my life. I want you to know how it is here, and I want him to encourage you. See, there was something going on in the church at Colossae that led them to hear this report about how things were in the church and it was tearing the church apart, and the church was torn apart. I mean, their Apostle Paul was in prison, he's in chains and things aren't going good at home. So they're discouraged and Paul sends Tychicus to encourage them, to refresh them, to breathe into them! I am so thankful to the people who have the spiritual gift of encouragement. I know you don't believe this, but there's times when I'm alone, I'm by myself, and I'm just...ummm. All of a sudden I'll get a text, I'll get a phone call and it'll be one of my encouragers, and wow, God just lifts me up! Thank you for being a feller. You may not be carrying the very Word of God back to a church like Tychicus was, but God uses you to encourage the fellers.

Then Onesimus. Now this surprises me. Do you know what he calls Onesimus? A faithful and beloved brother. Do you remember Onesimus? Whoa...he was a runaway slave who Paul says is one of you. He's a Colossian. He found himself working for a guy named Philemon, didn't like what was happening, and one day he just left and fled to Rome. Then he met a guy named Paul and Paul told him about Jesus. He repented of being a sinner, put his faith in Jesus, went down into the waters and identified his faith, and became a son of Paul, and Paul became his father and he poured his life into him. Now Paul's getting ready to send his son back home, but we got a problem. He's under a death sentence. Philemon can do whatever he wants to do to him. He has power over him. Now he's getting ready to come back to the church with Tychicus with this letter from Paul to the Colossians.

Now, can I tell you what I also think he's got? I think he's got another letter, and it's a letter Paul wrote to Philemon. So can imagine hearing the

news... *Whoa, is that Onesimus? Go get Philemon!* Now Onesimus meets Philemon. We don't know if there's witnesses or not. Can you see him pull out that letter from Paul and hand it to him, and then there's a greeting from Paul to Philemon, tells him how much he means to him, and then he says I know this guy Onesimus who's handing you this letter used to be useless to you, but now he's useful to you. He now knows Christ, he's a faithful and beloved brother to me. I've poured my life into him, he's my son, I'm his spiritual father. I want to keep him to myself but I'm sending him back home to you so he'll be useful to you. When he says if he took something he shouldn't have taken... I mean let's be honest, Onesimus worked for somebody else who had bought him. He probably didn't feel like his wages, his standard of living, his house was what it should have been. So when he's getting ready to flee and probably took a few things with him, he probably justified it thinking I deserve it. So Paul says if he took anything he shouldn't have taken, you put that on my account. When I see you, I'll pay because I'm hoping you preparing a room because I'm going to come and stay there when I come back to Colossae. Then Paul says I'll pay, but don't forget you owe me. *Whoa!* Can I give you my theory, my sanctified imagination? I believe that when Paul says that to Philemon, what he's reminding Philemon was this... I led you to Christ and now I'm sending a man who fled you back to you, but he's a changed man. I don't want you to treat him as a runaway slave; I want you to treat him as a transformed person who's a faithful and beloved brother. The relationship has completely changed. Now think about this. What's the odds of Paul leading a guy to Christ, Philemon, and then him having a slave run away, travel to Rome where Paul is? Two million people in Rome and Paul gets to lead him to Christ and then gets to disciple him, pour himself into him, and then send him back home. *Wow!*

I get so excited Onesimus because that was some of you! You used to be in bondage, in slavery to sin. You were useless to the Kingdom of God, and then praise God, while you were trying to run away God saw you, bought you, paid for you, convicted you, changed your life. Now you're in the

church of Jesus Christ as a feller and you're useful. Amen! You have no idea what it's like to be me and to know you get to pour yourself into people's lives and then see them go out to other states, to other nations. You let them go...why? Because this isn't about us, this isn't about the church, this is about the Kingdom of God. Some of our fellows have been redeemed and God's going to send them other places. Can you imagine the responsibility on Philemon to receive him back? Can I just stop here for a moment? There's going to be some people who are going to let you down. They're going to fail you. But when they get redeemed, please realize they're going from useless to useful. When you walk in that restaurant, when you walk in Walmart, if you meet them in the hallway don't you turn your head, don't you let Satan or your flesh remind you of who they used to be. They're a feller now, they're a faithful and beloved brother.

Now we meet three people who are grouped together. Paul says they're the only three with me who are Hebrews, Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus. Now this is not Jesus Christ, this is Jesus who's called Justus. Do you remember Aristarchus? I'll just call him Mr. A (it's much easier to say!). We meet him in Acts 20. Paul came to town in Acts chapter 19, and when Paul came to town, one of two things happened. There was either a revival or a riot. Well, a riot broke out and there was some disciples who were trying to save Paul from getting massacred. They tried to get him out of the city and Mr. A was one of these guys. So now Paul's having to leave and Mr. A decides he's going to go with him.

Now just using my sanctified imagination here, but I just picture this because what Paul's going to call Mr. A is my fellow prisoner. Whoa... Now I want to be honest with you. I've got some fellers in my life but if they go to prison, uh, not sure I want to be a feller! Now I'm just seeing this in my sanctified imagination. I can see him following Christ, Paul come into town, all of a sudden now he's got a favor with Paul wanting to be a friend to Paul, wanting to be a feller and he's getting ready to leave with Paul, but his mama knew Paul caused a riot. As he's leaving town, I can see his mama saying to him...*I'm warning you, you better stay away from that*



*guy. That guy's going to get you in trouble. If keep hanging around him, I promise you one day you're going to end up in jail.* Now mama's words are true because he's in jail too. Paul calls him a feller, a fellow prisoner. The Apostle Paul is in prison for preaching the gospel, for wanting to show the good news of Jesus Christ, and his feller has been there with him. And this feller wants to say hi, to greet the church at Colossae.

Then there's Mark, the cousin of Barnabas... then there is a parentheses. Ms. Linda taught me in school that in English grammar, when you're writing and you're not real sure if you're really understood, you put something in parentheses and it is going to clarify more intently what you just said. So evidently Paul believes there's something out in the community about Mark that's not true anymore and he wants to remind them he's already written about Mark, and he says if Mark comes to you, welcome him. Now you know why. If Mark had just showed up, some people wouldn't have welcomed him, right? Remember that story? Acts chapter 13, he's on the first missionary journey with Barnabas and Paul. They get about halfway on the journey and Mark, we're not sure why, but Mark wants to go home. Possibly he was a mama's boy. Have you ever been around mama's boys? Mama's boys can only live away from mama for so long. Now they're not flying everywhere, they're not taking boats everywhere, they're doing a lot of walking. And John Mark one day just says I'm going home, I'm missing my mama. Paul tries to talk him into staying and tells him how important the gospel is. People's salvation is on the line but he's missing Mama so he goes home.

The missionary journey ends, church celebrates, and they get ready to send Paul out again because Paul and Barnabas decide they need to go back and see how the churches are doing. And Barnabas says oh yeah, I'm going to take John Mark with us, and Paul says not over my dead body. And the Bible says in Acts 15, they come to blows. They have a sharp disagreement. Whoa... Can you imagine that? The great Apostle Paul and Barnabas, the first missionaries sent out, now coming to blows over John Mark? It was so bad that Paul said I'm not going. Barnabas said okay, I'm

going to take him with me and I'm going to start here, Paul got Silas and they went in two different directions. That's horrible. Don't give me that how glorifying this is that now we've got two missionary teams going out. Don't glorify that church down the road that started because of a split. That's not how Christians do things! Barnabas saw a change in John Mark and wanted to take him with him. Paul didn't see the change and wouldn't.

Now here in verse 10, Paul is having to say I was wrong...if John Mark shows up, he's greeting you, you welcome him. The Bible teaches us that Paul forgave John Mark. John Mark repented, and wow, they were together in the end. Do you know what John Mark did? I hope this gives hope to you...this guy who abandoned the gospel on a mission trip to go back home is led by the Holy Spirit to write a book called the Gospel of Mark. Do you know who his father was spiritually? It was a guy named Peter and Peter called Mark his son, and everybody believes the gospel of Mark is Peter's gospel. It is Peter's gospel but it's Mark's gospel. Mark's my favorite gospel. Do you know why Mark's my favorite gospel? Because he just goes wide open. I mean, Mark tells every story quicker than everybody else, and when he finishes his story, he says, "immediately," "immediately," "immediately," "immediately." Mark's writing to get us to the cross, and on that cross he declares the guy who says, "truly this was the Son of God!" Mark knows you can't know who Jesus is until you see Him on that cross dying for the sin of the world, not just your sin but everybody's sin! Some of you are Marks. You've had those times in your life when you abandoned, but you didn't stay abandoned, you came back and God is using in you. It's not your gospel it's God's gospel, but you're telling it with your flavor. That's okay that's what Mark did, because you can't know who Christ is until you see Him dying on that cross. May we never get over the cross! If you're a feller, you view everything through the cross. You know that person you're struggling with? Christ died for them too just like He died for you.

Justus. We know nothing about him except he was a feller of Paul. Paul describes Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus as "...my fellow workers for the

Kingdom of God.” Three Jews, Paul says, who are working for the Kingdom of God. Now I want to be clear here. This will not surprise you if you've been with me for my ministry, but if you're new to Hardin, this is going to surprise you—Paul has already been telling us in his letters that when it comes to the cross, there's no Jew, there's no Gentile, there's no slave nor free, there's no rich, there's no poor—we're all the same. And Christ went to the cross to die, to break down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles and to create a new body. That new body is the church. The covenant people of God today is the church. Paul tells us these three Jewish people are workers for the Kingdom of God.

Now I just want to ask this question, how can you be a worker for the Kingdom of God if the Kingdom of God is not here? Why are some of you waiting for the Kingdom of God to come? Why are some of you tying the coming Kingdom of God to the nation of Israel? It's not. The Kingdom of God is tied to the person of Jesus Christ! When Jesus Christ came the first time, He set up the Kingdom of God, and according to New Testament, the Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of His people. Christ is reigning right now! He is sitting on a throne, not a throne in Jerusalem, but the throne of heaven and He's reigning over His kingdom. His kingdom is you and I, fellers, people who have repented of our sin and put our faith and trust in Jesus. God is reigning, not compulsorily—making us do things we don't want to do, making us not do things we want to do, not passing laws and regulations, not having a spiritual military to keep us in line—He's reigning in your heart, He's reigning in your life. We're not into the letter of the law, we're into the spirit of the law. So for those of us who are in the Kingdom of God, our life looks different at work, our life looks different at home, our life looks different at a ballgame...if you're a feller, you are a worker in the Kingdom of God. Will there be a physical manifestation of the kingdom? Yes, but it's also not tied to their nation of Israel, it's tied to the second coming of Jesus. When He comes back, there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth and we're going to live with Him forever and ever and ever and ever.

That's going to be glorious! But you'll not enter or see the Kingdom of God in its physicalness until you first experience in its spiritualness, and we're in that kingdom stage right now.

So we have three Hebrew people who are workers in the Kingdom of God, not just workers, fellers just like Paul. Then Paul talks about this other guy named Epaphras, and he said he's one of you. Twice Paul says he's one of you. Now I got to be honest with you, it's so neat to just be Hardin.

There's just something that makes us unique if you're us. I'll never forget this, Ron Thompson and I went to a Southern Baptist Convention early in my ministry at Hardin because some people in the association wanted us to go and vote for a certain guy for president to lead the convention. So Ron and I get there and we're in this elevator, we're meeting some people that we have no idea who they are or where they're from. This man turns to me and Ron and says, just politely, "Where are you from?" The first words that came out of my mouth was, "We're from Murray." We talk a minute, we get out, we go on our way. Ron Thompson looked at me and he said, "Don't you ever tell somebody again we're from Murray. We're not from Murray, that's 12 miles down the road. We're from Hardin and we're proud to be from Hardin!" Amen? Now nothing against Murray, but you get what Paul's doing. Paul's saying Epaphras is one of you, he's a Colossian, he's just like you.

Now who is Epaphras? Remember what we're told in verse 7 of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, Epaphras was the guy who led them to Christ, brought the gospel to Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Many researchers believe that Epaphras actually is the first pastor of the church at Colossae, so it's possible that he is the pastor of the church. But they've got a problem and he went to Paul in Rome to check on Paul and also to share the story with Paul. So in this letter, Paul talks about Epaphras, he calls him a fellow servant of Christ, and then he says Epaphras is struggling when he prays. Do any of you ever struggle when you pray? Yeah. Do any you ever feel like when you're praying you're wrestling with God? Yeah. Now I want to make a statement here on what I believe about prayer. Prayer is not us

trying to change God's will to our will, but prayer changes our will to God's will, and sometimes it's a struggle. Paul sees how hard Epaphras is working for the Colossians, the Laodiceans, and the people of Hierapolis, and he writes to the church to tell them that. I mean, here's my scenario. Paul's under house arrest, he's possibly chained to a Roman soldier, and Epaphras, the pastor of the Church of Colossians, sits beside him. It's two o'clock in the morning and Paul's like... *Oh, will you quit praying? Shh, I'm trying to go to sleep!* He just keeps praying, he just keeps struggling, because do you know what his desire is for the people? He wants them to be mature.

This word 'mature' means complete, to be grown up, to understand who you are. Now watch this. What's the letter of Colossae about? It's about being complete in Christ. It's about growing up, it's being one, it's being who we're supposed to be. Amen? Is it possible the Holy Spirit of God took the prayer of Epaphras, the pastor of the church, and as Paul heard him praying for their maturity and for them to discern the will of God, the Holy Spirit leads Paul to write a letter that he gives to Tychicus and Onesimus and they take it back to the church because Paul saw this guy struggle in prayer? Wow...prayer changes things. It changes us. Don't you quit praying! Please want those who are fellers with you. Please want them to become fully grown, to quit acting like a spiritual baby who if they don't get what they want, they're going to cry till they get what they want. They're always going to view life from their perspective, not God's perspective.

Then Luke, the beloved physician. Didn't Luke write a gospel too? Didn't he write a book called the Book of Acts. Paul, who wrote so much of the New Testament, has Mark who wrote the first gospel, and Luke who wrote a gospel, with him...two Gentile. Wow! Then Demas, this one hurts...no description, just Demas. Demas is with Paul. A few years later, Paul's going to write to Timothy and say I'm sending Tychicus to you, but Demas is not with me anymore, he forsook me. He deserted me. He's gone. He went back to Thessalonica. Can I tell you what breaks my heart? Can I tell you

what my biggest hurt being pastor of this church for 42 years has been? Those people who sat under my teaching, sat under my ministry, and now have forsaken the gospel. Breaks my heart. Breaks my heart. There was a time when I would've never thought so and so would've done what they done and not be in church for the last 25 years. So do you know what hurts me this morning? I'm looking at some of you who just may also abandon the gospel and abandon us as fellers. I just want to warn you, you know my teaching and preaching, I'm not that guy who's going to defend you. I'm not going to be that guy who says I remember getting in the water with you and how sincere you were. If you abandon the gospel and you don't come back, you never knew Christ. You didn't have it and lose it, you never had it. You hear me as a feller? We fellers can do what unbelievers do, but we can't stay in it and we can't keep doing it because the Holy Spirit of God won't let us. Don't you hide behind that once saved, always saved thing. Yes, I believe in the eternal security of the believer, but you have to be a believer. If you have a moment of faith, it issues into a life of faithfulness, and if your moment of belief did not issue into a life of faith, you didn't have a moment of saving faith. Got it? So let's be careful. There is the potential for there to be a Demas among the fellers.

Paul now says to the church to greet the brothers in Laodicea and the church in Nympha house. Then he says that letter that I'm writing to you, after you read it, I want you to give it to the Laodiceans. I also wrote a letter to Laodicea and I want you to read that letter from them. Then I want you to look at Aristarchus and I want you to tell him to fulfill his ministry that he received in the Lord. Now quickly, can you imagine being the brothers down the road at Laodicea? Now, just to give you a framework here, this would be like there being a church in Hardin (Colossae), and then you've got Dexter and Olive (Laodicea and Hierapolis). Here's what me and you're supposed to do. We've received this letter from Paul, and when we see a brother from one those other churches, we're supposed say, "Hey, Paul says to tell you hi." So imagine you've been at town, you've met 50 people from Hardin, and all of a

sudden all 50 of those people have said, "Hey, Paul said to tell you hi." We got a responsibility! The Church of Colossae is spreading Paul's heart that because of Epaphras he's concerned not just about Colossae but Laodicea and Hierapolis. And then there's this church meeting in this lady's house. She's probably a widow, but she's opened up her house for the church to be in her house. Praise God! See, we're supposed to be reading the Word. You don't just pick out a certain letter, a certain book, and think that's your book; you read it all and you try to encourage others to read.

Then there's this man Archippus. Now he's mentioned in the first two verses in Philemon. Some scholars believe he's Philemon's son. He's received a ministry, a place where he is going to roll up his britches legs and his shirt sleeves, and he's going to get dirty serving God, and God wants him to fulfill his ministry. We don't know what's going on but something's going on in his life, and Paul's worried that he might not so he wants the church to come alongside him and encourage him. I believe God has given a ministry to each one of us, a place where we rub shoulders with people and we get dirty, we get messy with people. There's going to come a time when we're going to get so messy and it's going to look like nothing's happening, they're never going to change (How long am I going to keep doing this?), and we're going to want to quit. But we're never going to quit because this isn't what we chose to do, this is a calling from God and you've got a spiritual enabling from God to do what God wants you to do. We're going to fulfill the ministry for the glory of God, amen! So please fellers, get your mind off of yourself and look around. There are some people who need you to encourage them.

And when you get to the place that you're discouraged, listen to what Paul says. He said I wrote this greeting in my own hand. Now get this picture. If he's chained to a Roman soldier, how would you like to be that Roman soldier? Paul's dictated this letter to somebody else, and now he's writing this last greeting with his own hands, and he says, "Remember my chains." Poor, pitiful us. Oh, we've got it so bad, "So and so hurt my feelings!" Paul's chained to a soldier! He's in prison, but he's not imprisoned. Woo,

glory! And here's what he's saying to the church, "Grace be with you." If you keep coming to Hardin, you're going to understand this. I was raised to believe that grace was equal opportunity. God just putting Jesus on the cross and giving us the opportunity to be saved. I don't believe that anymore. Grace is not equal opportunity. Grace is God's enabling power. Grace is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourself so that we can now do what He did, and that's be faithful to our Father. For the rest of our life, as fellers not of Paul but of Jesus Christ, we're going to operate under the grace of God and we're going to fulfill our ministry. So I just have a closing question for you. How are you fellers doing? But even more personal, what are you fellers doing? If somebody saw you in the community, would your actions say you're just like them fellers down there at Hardin?