



## Reflecting On A New Connection To The Body

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

### Finding Out What Life Is All About

All the way through the New Beginnings series we've been using the Book of Colossians to help PREPARE the soil of our hearts for the Sunday messages, because the subject matter for this series was lifted straight out of chapters three and four of this Book. Today we'll REFLECT on Sunday's message using the last two verses of the Book of Colossians to direct our thoughts.

But, before we get to those verses specifically, let me remind you, that all the way through these daily studies, I've sought to call your attention to the similarities between the Book of Ephesians and the Book of Colossians. We've seen that one of the reasons for the obvious similarity in subject matter is that they were written at the same time. Perhaps even within a few hours of each other!

But, though these letters are strikingly similar in terms of CONTENT, they are extremely different in terms of INTENT. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write the Book of Ephesians to establish the FOUNDATION of the Church. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write the Book of Colossians to talk about the FULFILLMENT of the Church.

You see, the Book of Colossians tells us how to be "COMPLETE" (2:10). It's the Book that tells us how to become "ALL" that God intends for us to be. That's why the word "all" (say the word "all". That was for you, Rev! I couldn't resist!)—the word "all" is found at least 32 times in these four short chapters. And that doesn't even count the times that the word "fill" or "fulfill", or some word that has the same meaning as "complete" is found.

And I bring that up, because as Paul closes out this letter, I actually think that the Holy Spirit wanted to find one last way to teach us to know what being "RISEN WITH CHRIST" (2:12; 3:1) is all about, and how it was designed by God to bring to us the "completeness" or that "fulfillment" in life that Jesus called "abundant" in John 10:10. The Book ends with a simple principle that I think speaks directly to our day. Let me show you what I mean...

I think that you would agree, that there are many, many Christians in the 21st century (and, actually, I think that it might even be closer to the truth to say "MOST" Christians in the 21st century!) that even though they possess the RISEN LIFE of CHRIST within them, they still haven't tapped into what life is really all about. Their lives are still very "INCOMPLETE" and "UNFULFILLED." They are still unfulfilled in their relationship with God (3:1-17), and still unfulfilled in their relationships with their own family (3:18-21). They're unfulfilled in their job (3:22-4:1), they don't know how to develop meaningful relationships with people outside of the church (4:2-6), and what's crazier yet, and even compounds the lack of fulfillment in their lives, is that they don't know how to develop meaningful relationships with people inside the church either (4:7-18)!

And, I think the Holy Spirit led Paul to end this letter in a way that highlights a principle, that if it isn't "THE" missing link in 21st century Christianity, it is certainly a KEY one, in terms of Christians living "unfulfilled" lives. Let's see if we can grab ahold of the principle.

Now, ever since Paul hit chapter 4 and verse 7, he's been highlighting his ministry team. He gives us a "snapshot" of each of the team members that were with him in Rome at the time of the writing of this letter and includes a "caption" describing them under each one. I think the whole passage just screams this same theme about our "completeness" and "fulfillment," in the fact that we will never actually become "ALL" that God intends for us to become without being "connected" to others in the Body, and without others in the Body being "connected" to us.

But, in verse 17, Paul mentions the name of one other person. This isn't a member of his ministry team, and he's not with him in Rome. Paul concludes this letter saying,

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou has received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it. The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen. (Col. 4:17-18)

And once again, I would imagine that you're thinking right now, "Say what? Those verses don't say anything about what LIFE or the RISEN LIFE is all about, much less, finding "COMPLETENESS" and "FULFILLMENT" in life!" But, bear with me...

Now, we meet this guy Archippus in verse 17. We don't know a whole lot about him, but we do know that for some reason, he receives a very strong exhortation from Paul about his ministry! Paul says...

Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it. (Col. 4:17)

Now, what's that all about? Well, if you compare this statement with the placement of his name in the Book of Philemon, it would seem that Archippus is the son of Philemon and Apphia, and of course, they are the couple who had opened their home to be the gathering place for the church in Colossae. Philemon 1 and 2 says...

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house.

And, you'll remember that we talked about the false teachers that had begun to infiltrate the church in Colossae, and how the pastor, Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12-13), had made a 1000 mile journey to Rome to get counsel and instruction from Paul about the situation. And by the exhortation with which Paul ends this letter, specifically addressing Archippus, it seems apparent that during the time that Epaphras was away from the flock in Colossae, he had entrusted Archippus with the responsibility of being the interim pastor. When you make that connection, all of a sudden Colossians 4:17 carries a tremendous amount of weight. Listen to it again with that in mind...

Archippus, (I wonder if they called him Archie? I'm sure I would have!) Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.

In other words, "Now, Pastor Archie, let me remind you of something buddy...You didn't receive this ministry from your momma or your daddy, and you didn't receive it from Pastor Epaphras either! You received this responsibility directly from the Lord, and so, let me encourage you to take it very, very seriously! You take heed to it, my brother! You give it everything you have, and you make sure that you finish the job! See to it, that you fulfill it!"

Now, listen. I think God ends this Book with a principle designed to get us to recognize that we're never really going to be fulfilled in life, and will never really become all we could be and should be, apart from our connection with others in the Body (4:7-16) and apart from MINISTRY (4:17). And to tie this into yesterday's study, when I use the word "ministry," I'm not talking about you becoming a Pastor, Youth Pastor, or Missionary! What I'm saying to you, is that every single one of us, like Archie in verse 17, have "received" a "ministry" from the Lord! And unless we "take heed" to it, and unless our lives are spent seeking to "fulfill it," we'll never really know what life is all about!

Listen, some of us have come to Christ, and ever since we've been saved, we've heard these promises about "fulfillment", and this "abundant life" that is found in Christ, and yet somehow, we've never quite tapped into it. In fact, if the truth were known, some of us may even have become a little bit discouraged, disillusioned, and disenchanted because we haven't. But, oh folks, please allow me to be a voice in your life to remind you that the Christian life is not simply about coming to church, sitting on pews, singing songs, and placing an offering in the plate as it passes by during the special. No—the Book of Colossians ends with living examples that teach us that the Christian life is all about our involvement in the lives of people, and our involvement in ministry!

Based on everything I understand about the Christian life from the New Testament, I believe it is impossible to ever really experience fulfillment and abundant living, apart from the ministry God has given to us. You say, "Well, what do you mean? What is this MINISTRY that God has given to us?" Well, listen to 2 Corinthians 5:17 and 18...

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, AND HATH GIVEN TO US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

Listen y'all! "THAT'S the "MINISTRY" that every single one of us who have been made new creatures in Christ have been "GIVEN" ...The MINISTRY of RECONCILIATION!

It shakes out like this... We were helplessly and hopelessly separated from God. There was a wall a million miles thick called sin that was between us. Christ came to the earth and died so that the barrier of sin could be removed, so that we could be RECONCILED to God. That's what Ephesians 2:11-16 is all about...

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

That's what Christ did on the cross! And when we called upon the name of Christ, the verses we looked at a minute ago from 2Cor. 5:17-18, tell us we were given two key things. First, we were "given" the gift of SALVATION (Eph. 2:8), which made us "new creatures" in Christ (2Cor. 5:17). And secondly, we were "given" the gift of MINISTRY (2Cor. 5:18). In other words, God's plan was to take ALL of those who have been RECONCILED to Him, and use them as His MINISTERS (servants), so that others might be RECONCILED to Him! And, I mean, who better to share it, than someone who has experienced it?!

Folks, listen. If you have received the gift of salvation (2Cor. 5:17), you have also received the MINISTRY of RECONCILIATION (2Cor. 5:18)! And I believe Colossians 4:17 is letting us know that until we are "TAKING HEED" to that "MINISTRY" that we have "RECEIVED IN THE LORD", and are seeking

to "FULFILL IT" every day of our lives, we'll never be "ALL" that God wants us to be, and intends for us to be... and, He'll never use us the way He intends for us to be used... and because of that, we'll never really experience the abundant life He intended for those of us who have been RISEN WITH CHRIST.

And actually, we're back to where we started back in Colossians 3:1 and 2. Remember, Paul told us that now that we've been "risen with Christ," we're to "seek those things which are above"—in that realm where we're seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). And we went to the Word of God together to see if we could identify what those "things above" actually were, and what God was actually intending by commanding us to "set our affection" upon them. And we learned that we are to...

Seek the PERSON of God (1Jn.1:7),  
because God wants us to LOVE Him (mark 12:30)

Seek the WORD Of God (Ps.119:89),  
because God wants us to KNOW Him (Ps. 138:2; Phil.3:10)

Seek the THRONE of God (Ezek.1:26-28; Isa.6:1-3; Rev.4),  
because God wants us to WORSHIP Him (Jn.4:23)

Seek the FAMILY of God (Eph. 3:14-15),  
because God wants us to MINISTER through Him:

- Our GIFTS to those IN His family (1Pet. 4:10)
- The GOSPEL to those He INTENDS to be in His family (Acts 20:24)

Do you remember all of that? Man, I hope you do. I was hoping that Colossians 3:1 and 2 would become a part of the fabric of our daily prayers as a result of this series. But, we talked about the fact that LOVING God, and KNOWING Him, and WORSHIPPING Him is something we're going to do better in heaven than we're doing right now. And, the point was, if that's really what this RISEN LIFE was about, God would have certainly just gone ahead and snatched us up to heaven the moment He saved us! But, He didn't! He left us here for a while, and tells us to spend our time down here LOVING, KNOWING, and WORSHIPPING Him, and MINISTERING our GIFTS to one another, so that we can be effective in MINISTERING the GOSPEL to the people of this world that He loves with all of His heart. And listen, THAT'S ultimately why we're still here! To be MINISTERS of RECONCILIATION!

I think Colossians 4:17 is a perfect capstone to this entire series. It brings it all together. It points us toward God's key purpose in giving to us a "New Beginning". I want you to look at the verse one more time, but I've left a blank where Archippus' name was in the verse. Why don't you take out a pen and plug your name in this verse, and read it with the same seriousness with which Archippus would have read it twenty centuries ago.

\_\_\_\_\_, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.

If you have questions and/or comments regarding today's study, please direct correspondence to [mtrotter@nwbible.org](mailto:mtrotter@nwbible.org)