

Whenever we encounter a list of names in the Bible, I almost guarantee that we stop paying attention. Because it seems like it just doesn't have anything to do with anything. And maybe to prove my point, of the ten names that we have in our reading for this evening--even if you count Paul--how many of them do you remember? One? Two? It's the kind of thing that makes us just gloss over and think that this just doesn't apply. But the Holy Spirit doesn't give us this information just because he wants to. The Holy Spirit gives us these things to teach us, to tell us something about what it means to be a Christian. And so even with something like a list of names of the end of one of Paul's epistles, we should pay attention, because God is teaching us here in this place.

And maybe the most important thing that we can learn from a passage like this is that everything that Paul has said in his epistle is something that matters. He didn't write it as a textbook. He didn't write it as just a theory about what it means to be a Christian. He wasn't just telling us, "this is an ideal that maybe we can try to reach." Paul was writing all of these things to real people with real lives in the midst of a real situation. And so they needed a real encouragement to continue living as Christians in the midst of their troubles. And so a passage like this is helpful to us, because it shows us just how personal this all is. It is written to the Colossians, and it is written to you and to me.

Because consider the care and the concern that a passage like this shows. Tychicus, for example, is described as being "a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." But Paul sent him not only to tell the Colossians about what was going on with him, but also so that they may be encouraged in their hearts, that they may be strengthened. Because Paul cared about them so much that he sent Tychicus to them, so that they would be strengthened as Christians. And Onesimus, who also goes along with him and who we also meet in the book of Philemon, does the same thing. Because these men are concerned for the Colossians to help them find salvation in the Lord. Aristarchus is described as a "fellow prisoner" of Paul, one who was in chains for the sake of the Gospel. And so he also sends greetings to the Colossians, even though he may have never met them, because he wants to show them that Christian love and care and concern. Mark here is the same Mark who wrote us the Gospel, and along with him is Jesus who is called Justus. And these men send their greetings, not as a way of just saying "Hello, how are you doing?" kind of a thing, but rather to say, "We are your Christian brothers, going through the same struggles, going through the same problems. And we send you our greetings as Christians, so that you may be strengthened in the Lord." Epaphras we have met before, because he is the Colossians' pastor, the one who brought all of these things to Paul in the first place. But Epaphras is not only concerned about them so that he talks about these things with Paul. He also prays for them every day, saying that he is "struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God." What care that shows! What a concern that shows for the well-being of the Colossians! To not only pray for them, but to pray that they would become better Christians each and every day. We also have here Luke, the same Luke who wrote the Gospel as well as the book of Acts, together with Dimas, who is often with him. They send their greetings as well as fellow Christians in the Lord. And all of these things show us, Christians, that they want to build each other up, even if they have never met one another. To show that they are not alone in the midst of their struggles, that the Colossians are not doing these things off by themselves, but together they are part of something greater in the Lord.

And the Colossians are reminded of that as well when they are instructed to send greetings to other congregations. To the Laodiceans who were nearby. To Nympha and the church who was in her house. As well as to Archippus, to encourage him to fulfill the ministry that he had been given. In all of these things, they are being built up together, to show that Christian care and concern for one another which we have in Christ Jesus.

But perhaps the greatest example of this in our reading for this evening is the last verse. Because Paul himself shows how much he cares for them by writing, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you." Because in those days, whenever you wanted to write a letter, you would say it out loud, and a secretary would write it down. That's how most of the New Testament was written. You didn't do your own writing. So for Paul to say that he had written this greeting with his own hand shows that he's put his signature to it. He cares about them so much that he himself finishes the letter, and with his own writing shows that love towards them which he has in the Lord. A genuine concern, a genuine Christian love for real people in the midst of a real situation.

So then when Paul calls for them to pray, as he does in the first part of our reading, he's not doing it just because that's what you're supposed to do. He's not doing it just because this is the ideal, and maybe you can hope to reach it. He encourages them to pray, because he cares about them, because he cares for their salvation. Because prayer is something which strengthens us, Christians. Prayer is something which brings us into the presence of God. And whoever is constant in prayer is not going to be led astray by the false teachings of the world. And so Paul's encouragement, then, is out of love, because he wants them to remain steadfast in the faith. And we see that also in the care and concern which they have towards him, praying for him in the midst of his imprisonment, praying things would go well for him. But also praying that the Gospel would go out into the world, so that a door would be opened, and many more would come to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But above all, Paul exhorts them to live in a godly way also out of a care and concern for the unbelievers around them. So that by looking at what they do as Christians, those who do not know Christ may come to know the Gospel. In all of these things, over and over again, we see that Christian care and concern which comes from being in the Lord.

So I have to ask you then, Christians, do we show that same care and concern towards one another and towards the world around us? Or has it become something of a formality among us? When you say that you're going to pray for someone, do you actually do it? Or is it something that you just say because it sounds nice, you want to make it sound like you care, but you forget to do it little bit later? Or are we concerned for the salvation of our neighbor and not just for ourselves? To do things which build them up as Christians so that they too would be strengthened in their walk with the Lord? Or are we just looking out for ourselves because that's all we really care about? Because Christians, these are questions we should consider. Because Christian love is not something that happens in a vacuum. It's not something that just happens in theory. Christian love is meant for real people in a real situation in their real lives in a real world. And so we are called to show that Christian love to one another, and to show that same care and concern which Paul and all of these other people showed for the Colossians, because we are brothers and sisters in the Lord.

So Christians, let us care for one another, because we are part of the same body. Let us greet one another as members of the one body of Christ, as members of one family. Let us pray for one another, not just as a formality, not just something to do nice, not just because we're in church, but because of that care and concern which we have for each other in the Lord. And let us love one another, because Jesus has first loved us. And he loved us so much, Christians, that he gave himself for us to forgive us our sins. And because we belong to him, we are also bound to one another. So let us care for each other in the Lord because of what Christ has done for us.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, through the gift of your Holy Spirit you have knit us into one body in Jesus Christ. We pray that you would strengthen us always to care for one another, so that we would show that same love toward one another which you have first showed us through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.