

Bible Study 101:

19. Outline of Philemon; Laodicean Question

We are going to continue our Bible Study 101 course this morning with the outline of Philemon.

But, I also want to consider the question that was raised back when we did the outline of Colossians, to consider whether this letter might be the solution to the question.

{Colossians 4:16} And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

I would not try to establish that anything I say is the authority on a given subject; but I'd have as much confidence as I would have in any scholar who claims the Holy Spirit was only for the time before the canon of Scripture was established, and we have no further need for the Holy Spirit as individuals.

Let's compare the closing verses of Colossians with some verses in Philemon, and see what we can figure out, just by logic.

{Colossians 4:7–18} All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: 8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; 9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.

Onesimus is accompanying Tychicus to Colossae.

This is the same Onesimus as Paul is writing about to Philemon.

He is with Paul now, and being sent with Tychicus to Colossae.

But, we better not just assume that is the end of his journey.

10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) . . . 14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

Now, look at verse 24 of Philemon.

{Philemon 1:24} Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

These same people are with Paul when he is writing both epistles.

Back to Colossians, notice verses 12–13

12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.

What does this mean? It clearly indicates he is with Paul, and states that he has a special burden for three churches close together. The people at Colossae clearly know Epaphras, but his interest has been in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. Notice Philemon 23:

{Philemon 1:23} There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

It should read, "The following people salute thee," with verse 24. Now verses 15–17

15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. 16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.

Now, here's where I think we might see something, if we have eyes to see:

He tells them to salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and in the same breath tells them to salute Nymphas and the church which is in his house.

He tells them to read this epistle, Colossians, that is, in the church of the Laodiceans.

And without taking a breath, he also tells them to read the epistle from Laodicea. Not to the Laodiceans, but from Laodicea.

An epistle from Laodicea, not specifically to the Laodiceans.

And, still in the same breath, he has instructions for Archippus, to take heed to his ministry to fulfill it.

Where is Archippus connected?

Read the first two verses of Philemon.

{Philemon 1:1–2} Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, 2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:

This is a family; a home meeting of a church.

Philemon the father; Apphia the mother, and Archippus lives in the same household; either a son, or another close relative.

But, this assembly is not identified as being located in Colossae.

Now, back to Colossians, what is it saying?

Most scholars assume Philemon lived in Colossae, and that these epistles were both sent to the same location.

But, there is no such indication in either epistle.

It seems to me that what is supposed to happen is that Colossians is to be read at Colossae, then taken to Laodicea where they are to salute the church, read the epistle, and also some other epistle called the epistle from Laodicea, but not addressed to a church; and then it seems to me it is in the context of being in Laodicea that Archippus named. Paul exhorts Archippus in a similar way as he exhorted Timothy in I Timothy 4:11:14.

I think this is pretty convincing, though the scholars do not see it.

Note: I outlined Philemon on the fly, so there is no outline.