

COLOSSIANS: DISCERNING TRUE DOCTRINES
"Part VIII: Guarding By Faith Our Adhesion To God's Path For Us"
(Colossians 4:7-18)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many start out well for Christ, but not everyone finishes well. Consider the following:

(1) A youth named Karl was baptized into the Lutheran church in Germany in 1824 at age six, and was confirmed at age 16. Needing to graduate from high school, he had to write a religious essay, and chose to write on "The union of believers with Christ . . ."

So, in that essay, Karl wrote, "Our heart, reason, history, and the work of Christ convince us that without Him we cannot achieve our goal, that without him we are doomed by God, that only Christ can save us . . . the joy which the Epicureans in their superficial philosophy sought in vain . . . is a joy known only to the innocent heart united with Christ, and through Christ to God."

That may have been a great **START**, but, tragically, Karl did not grow in those truths. This youth whom we know today as Karl **Marx** later wrote his communist manifesto that influenced the twentieth century for the **worse!** (taken from "Prometheus Unchained," Moody Monthly, by Mark Elliott and Art Moore, p. 25).

(2) In 1638, Harvard Divinity School was begun by our Puritan forefathers to train young men for the ministry. The record of Harvard's founders is as follows: "After God had carried us safely to New England, and we had built our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government; one of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance learning, and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust." (The Rebirth of America, The Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, p. 41)

Yet, today, Ari L. Goldman, himself an Orthodox Jew, attended classes at Harvard and wrote in his book, The Search For God At Harvard that in the midst of its radical theological emphases, "Christian spirituality was the hardest faith to find." (Review by Stephen Kendrick in the Hartford Courant)

How can we FINISH well for Christ once we START living for Him and His glory?

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "A party I know started out well for Christ only to 'crash' in defeat. Yet others keep going and really MATURE in the Lord. Is there direction and motivation available on finishing well for God?"

- I. **As Paul prepared to close his Colossian epistle, he stated his concern that Archippus FINISH his ministry well, Colossians 4:17.**
- II. **This statement reflects Paul's Colossians 1:28 goal that the Colossians MATURE in Christ, Bible Know. Com., N.T., p. 685.**
- III. **If we view from Scripture the SPIRITUAL end of those about whom Paul wrote in this closing, we can see the enormous CONTRAST that EITHER heeding or NOT HEEDING God's word by faith has on how we FINISH in life: (Colossians 4:7-18)**
 - A. On the one hand, several of Paul's helpers were wonderfully faithful to God's truth and would end up with great track records for Christ:
 1. Luke, the beloved physician, stayed with Paul in his imprisonment as he did through much of his missionary career, enduring even shipwreck with him, Colossians 4:14a, Acts 1:1; 16:10; 27:1-28:11.
 2. Tychicus faithfully ministered to Paul in prison, becoming a courier for Paul to the churches where Paul had ministered, Col. 4:7-8.
 3. Aristarchus stood with Paul and suffered imprisonment with him, becoming a co-sufferer with Paul for Christ's sake, Col. 4:10a.
 4. Epaphras grew in his love for Christians, becoming an ardent prayer warrior for believers throughout the Lycus Valley, Col. 4:12-13.
 - B. Others were **initial failures** but became **HUGE overcomers by faith**:
 1. Justus had been born into Judaism, but he courageously left its dead legalism to believe in Christ and help Paul, 4:11; Acts 15:5, 7-11.
 2. Onesimus started out for this world's lusts as a runaway slave only to be saved and risk his life by **faith** in Christ and return to his master, Col. 4:9a, Phm. 10-11. He ended up in the ministry, 4:9b!
 3. Mark first **failed**, but later **greatly overcame** that failure by **grace**:
 - a. When Paul wrote Colossians, he noted that Mark was to be received by the Church with special instructions, Col. 4:10b,c.
 - b. These instructions related to Mark's great turn-around story: (a) Mark at first joined Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey only to **flee** when facing **spiritual conflict** and/or **hardship**, Acts 13:4-12, 13. (b) Thus, when Paul and Barnabas considered taking a second missionary journey and Mark wanted to join

them, Paul resisted where Barnabas insisted Mark come. This **sadly** led Paul and Barnabas to a ministry **division**, Acts 15:36-39a. (c) Paul then traveled with Silas while Barnabas took Mark back to Cyprus apparently to continue disciplining him, Acts 15:39b-40. (d) Mark later rebounded well enough for Paul to recommend him with qualifying instructions in Colossians 4:10b. (e) He still improved so that, near the end of Paul's life, Paul could ask for Mark to come as a profitable co-worker, 2 Tim. 4:11b. (f) Mark became so adept at ministry that God used him to **write** the *Gospel* of Mark, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, p. 1397! In view of Mark's initial **failure** as a *fleeing, faithless servant*, it is a testimony of God's **GRACE** that he wrote of Jesus as God's **Servant** Who faced the cross and its great angelic conflict and hardship for us! (John 12:31; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, v. III, p. 110)

- C. Sadly, Demas appears in Colossians 4:14b with Luke as a helper to Paul only later to fade into spiritual failure as he later *faithlessly* left the ministry to indulge in his *worldly lusts*, 2 Timothy 4:9-10a.
- D. Ultimately, Paul addressed Archippus, a man at the **crossroads** of deciding either to finish well like Luke or fail as would Demas, 4:17:
 - 1. Paul noted Archippus had been given a ministry from God, 4:17b.
 - 2. Yet, he was in danger of not finishing that ministry due to some trial (either to quit out of discouragement or to cease ministry for the lure of this world), 4:17a. (Bible Know. Com., N.T., p. 685)
 - 3. Archippus needed to decide to complete that work by heeding the truths of God in God's power, Col. 4:17c; 1:28; 2 Tim. 1:13-14.

Application: To **GUARD** our **adhesion** to God's truth for spiritual maturity in Christ, (1) if we have not yet done so, we must overcome the **POSITIONAL** defeat of this life by believing in Christ to be placed into God's kingdom, Col. 1:12-14. (2) As a **BELIEVER** who has eternal security, we retain **EXPERIENTIAL** fervor and **FINISH** life well by looking to God in **FAITH** (a) to counter **FLIGHT** from **TRIALS** or the **ANGELIC CONFLICT** (b) as well as **SWERVING** off to indulge in the **LUSTS** of the world. (c) **IF** we have **A LREADY** started down the path of **FAILURE**, look to Onesimus' example or the example of Mark as **HOPE** for a great turn-around by **FAITH!**

Lesson: **HUGE** long-term spiritual success in life is achieved **IF** we (1) **TRUST** God (2) in utilizing His **GRACE** to equip us to (3) overcome **EITHER** (a) the fear of troubles and the angelic conflict **OR** (b) the lure of this world's lusts (cf. 1 Jn. 2:14b; 1 Jn. 2:15-17) (c) to do God's will!

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

A very long time ago, on a far-off, hot, dusty Middle Eastern roadway, two young widows stood in their long robes in the middle of a highway as they contemplated what to do with their lives.

The choice wasn't easy: they were traveling with their mother-in-law back to her homeland in Palestine when the elderly mother-in-law turned to her two daughters-in-law and urged them to turn back to their comfortable homeland in Moab. She prompted them to return to a promising life of remarriage and ease in their homeland.

One of the young widows, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell and turned back to that "better" life in Moab. Yet, as she walked back down the road from which she had come, she passed out of history, vanishing from our sight.

The other widow turned to her mother-in-law to say what has since been repeated in numerous Christian wedding vows: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." (Ruth 1:16-17)

Ruth's decision on that road to go to Bethlehem with Naomi did not appear to be as promising as Orpah's choice, and it involved hardship as Ruth had to take a gleaner's job in a dangerous land in the godless era of the Judges. However, her choice to adhere to Naomi's God led to rich rewards: Ruth was remarried to Boaz that led to her bearing a son, Obed, who became an ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ!

One wonders what **might** have been had **Orpah** decided to follow Naomi's God and keep traveling with Ruth! We will never know -- Orpah's choice to turn back to Moab settled that. All we know is that **Ruth** decided for God, as difficult and costly as that might have seemed to her at the time, and so God **highly** rewarded her!

Each of us is at a similar crossroads today. We are listening to God's Word taught and we have a decision to make on it. Will we heed God's truths in His Word and follow His will no matter where that path leads and no matter the temporal circumstances involved? The DECISION will affect us long-term because WHAT we DECIDE involves eternal rewards.

What will WE decide regarding God's truths today?