

Lesson Thirteen – First Quarter 2026 (Thursday)

Theme: *A Message for Laodicea*

I. The Text: Colossians 4:16–18 (KJV)

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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 fulfil it.

18 The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.

II. Verse 16 — The Communal Nature of Scripture

1. “When this epistle is read among you...”
 - Paul *assumes* the letter will be read aloud in worship.
 - This confirms that epistles were **communal documents**, not private advice.
2. “...cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.”
 - Churches were expected to **share** apostolic counsel.
 - This sets a precedent for the way Scripture/counsel circulates today.

- What was written to Colossae is also **for us**, because we are the continuation of the church community.
- 3. “...and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”
 - Here is the puzzle:
 - What “epistle from Laodicea”?
 - Do we have it?
 - Was it lost?
 - Was it something else entirely?

(We will return to this in Section VII.)

III. Verse 17 — The Mysterious Archippus

Who is Archippus?

1. Mentioned in **Philemon 1:2**:
 - Listed alongside Philemon and his wife.
2. **Philemon’s wife’s name: Apphia** (Φιλήμω... καὶ Ἀπφίᾳ).
3. Some interpreters believe Archippus may have been:
 - Their **son**, or
 - A close relative living in their household, or
 - A leader connected to the church that met in Philemon’s home.

Meaning of His Name

- “Archippus” = “**Master of the horse**” / “**Horse ruler**.”

- From *archos* (leader) + *hippos* (horse).
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IV. The Charge to Archippus

“Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.”

1. He has a **specific calling** from God.
 2. Paul warns him not to abandon his assignment.
 3. Historical tradition suggests:
 - Archippus may have been sent to **Laodicea** as an overseer.
 - Paul, aware of the spiritual weakness there (foreshadowed in Rev. 3), urges him:
 - Don't shrink back.
 - Fulfill your calling.
 - Serve even in a spiritually difficult environment.
 4. Application:
 - Ministry assignments are not always easy or glamorous.
 - But if God gave it, He expects us to **finish it**.
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V. Verse 18 — Paul's Signature and Bonds

“The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.”

1. Letters were generally **dictated to a scribe** (an amanuensis).
2. But the apostle himself would add the closing **in his own handwriting** to authenticate it.

3. As Pastor Doug Batchelor and others have noted:
 - Because of Paul's **poor eyesight**, his letters may have ended with **large handwriting**.
 4. Paul's final word is always:
 - **Grace.**
 - This is fitting, because grace was the center of his testimony and theology.
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VI. The Laodicea Letter — Three Main Interpretations

Paul says:

"...read the epistle from Laodicea."

There are **three major views**:

1. The "Lost Letter" Theory

- Some early Christians believed Paul wrote an actual **Epistle to the Laodiceans**.
 - A false letter surfaced in the **1st–2nd century**, claiming to be that letter—but was quickly recognized as **inauthentic**.
 - We have no credible evidence of a lost canonical letter.
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2. The "Forward Our Letter" Theory

- The phrase could mean:

- “Make sure this letter gets forwarded *to* Laodicea.”
 - And then Laodicea forwards theirs (perhaps a circular letter) back to Colossae.
 - In other words, it’s a **postal instruction**, not a reference to a missing book of Scripture.
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3. The “Regular Correspondence” Theory

- Paul may have been in normal communication with Laodicea.
 - He wanted the Colossians to receive whatever recent letter Laodicea had already received.
 - This supports the idea of **interconnected, cooperating congregations**.
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VII. The Spiritual Point: The Church Was Never Meant to Be Divided

1. Colossae.
2. Laodicea.
3. Hierapolis (mentioned in Col. 4:13).
4. Philemon’s house church.

All shared letters.

All shared counsel.

All shared leadership.

All shared struggle.

All shared mission.

They were one community — just like we should be.

And even Laodicea — the lukewarm church of Revelation 3 — **was not abandoned**.
Jesus ends that message by saying:

- “If anyone hears my voice...”
- “I stand at the door and knock...”
- “Be zealous and repent...”

Christ was **still pursuing** Laodicea.
Still inviting.
Still redeeming.

The communal message of Colossians is simple:

Divisiveness is not God’s way.

The churches belonged to each other, prayed for each other, and learned from each other.

And so must we.

VIII. Closing Thought

Paul’s final words in the book of Colossians are a call to:

- **Community**
- **Shared counsel**
- **Faithful ministry**
- **Unity between congregations**
- **Grace-filled perseverance**

A message for Colossae.
A message for Laodicea.
And a message for us today.