

Colossians 4:2-18

This concluding section focuses on general counsel for a Christian's response to daily circumstances. How do you live today, in a world given over to false values, with much conflict, shame, and degrading practices? How should we then live?

I. Be Devoted to Prayer Col. 4:2-4

A. Centrality of Prayer 4:2

As the letter opening began with assurance of Paul's prayer for the Colossians, so the main section concludes with Paul's encouragement that they should be faithful in prayer, for him as well (4:3). This was no mere formality but an expression of the indispensability of prayer.

Προσκαρτερέω (proskartereo) "*be devoted to*" has the basic sense of "*persist at, remain with*"; so with people, "*be loyal to someone*", and with things, "*occupy oneself diligently with, pay persistent attention to*". In the latter sense prayer is the most common single object of the verb *devotion* in the New Testament: "*busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, be devoted to, to persevere in prayer*" as here (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Rom. 12:12).

Question: What might that look like for us today? What does a person devoted to prayer do? How can I know if I am devoted to prayer?

We don't relegate prayer to a specific time only. You may have a specific time designated to pray but that is not the only time you pray. To be devoted to prayer indicates that prayer is the normal response to needs, people and circumstances. Prayer is the first thing not the last thing. It could be verbal and personal but it could also be nonverbal in your mind to the Lord. It carries with it the idea of bringing everything into the presence of God. I am awed by the fact that I can enter God's presence and delighted to do so.

Note the two words Paul attaches to devoted prayer – alert and thankful. Alert – awake and alert as opposed to groggy; stimulating as opposed to dull and listless; energetic as opposed to routine. It is the same word Jesus used when he told his disciples to "*watch and pray*".

One writer summed it up this way: Christianity is poorly lived because it is poorly prayed. We are in a spiritual conflict and we must remain alert and pray. As you do so, be thankful.

We have mentioned this before but as a reminder thanksgiving is a constant theme in Colossians: 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17. This short letter is one of the most "*thankful*" in the New Testament. Here thankfulness provides an important balance to the call for watchfulness: we are to keep alert, not in a spirit of fear or anxiety, but with the confidence and assurance that our resources (*in Christ*) are more than equal to the potential challenges.

Thankfulness reminds us of the faithfulness of God in the past and encourages us to trust him now. Thankfulness moves us from the gift to the giver.

B. Prayer for Leadership 4:3-4

Paul focuses on a specific prayer request for himself. As Paul was praying for the church in Colossae (1:3b-9) he now asks the believers to pray for him. He asks specifically for 2 things: 1) the opportunity to proclaim the Word of God, and 2) clarity in the proclamation.

Is it not interesting that Paul prays for more opportunity not necessarily release from prison? It was the preaching of the gospel that got him into prison and he was okay with that so long as he had opportunities to preach while there.

Don't we at times think that if our circumstances were different (*job, family, neighborhood*) we would be better

Christians or more effective witnesses for Christ? Perhaps we could pray for the opportunity to be faithful where we are and not a change in our circumstances.

What surprises me more is the second aspect of this request. Look at vs. 4. “*to make it known*” carries the idea of manifest, to reveal, make clear and understandable. Paul asked the believers to pray for him to make the gospel, the truth of God’s word, clear. Again he calls it “*the mystery of Christ*”. He already explained what that mystery is in chapter 1:26-27 – Christ in you the hope of glory.

Paul of all people, trained, gifted, and experienced still asks for prayer. What does that say to us about praying for Jace, ABC teachers, Student ministry leaders, and Grace Kids teachers?

One of the most important things we can do is pray for those who teach Scripture to make it clear. Paul acknowledged that prayer makes all the difference in communicating the gospel and the Word of God. How often have we thought or even said, “*The least I can do for you is pray?*” When in reality that is the most you can do.

So as you live out your faith in the world start by being devoted to prayer and as you do so pray for the leadership and those who communicate the truth of God’s word.

II. Live Wisely Colossians 4:4

The exhortation to “*walk in wisdom*” (ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε) is an effective summary of one of the main emphases of the letter beginning in chapter 1:9-10 – it is the filling of the knowledge of Christ in all spiritual wisdom and understanding that enables you to live in a manner that is pleasing to God and bears fruit.

Wisdom is an aspect of Paul’s teaching (1:28). Our teaching is to be with wisdom as well (3:16). That is true because our lives are hidden in Christ who is our life (3:3-4). And Christ is the storehouse of wisdom (2:3). James 3:13-18 gives us insight into what this wisdom looks like in the midst of life.

Note that whatever he means by wise conduct it is wise conduct in front of outsiders – those not in the church but those who do not believe. So then what is meant by ‘*wise conduct*’? Simply stated it makes the most of the opportunity and speaks with grace and flavor.

The verb ἐξαγοράζω (exagorazo) would normally mean “*buy*” or “*buy back,*” and so “*redeem*” (Gal. 3:13; 4:5). The likely meaning here, therefore, is “*gain or reclaim time*” which would otherwise be lost or slip away. We would say something like “*making the most of the opportunity*” or “*Don’t waste the time or the opportunity.*”

How does one make the most of the opportunity when it comes to conversations with nonbelievers? In the context of Col. 4 we make the most of the opportunity when our words are full of grace and seasoned with salt or flavor. It is meeting the other person where they are, not where we want them to be.

For our words to be with grace means first that our hearts are saturated with the grace of God. Then we speak with grace - not judgment; and we share the message of grace – the gospel. As we focus on grace and our words are full of grace we add a little salt – otherwise known as flavor.

The picture is as far away as we can imagine from that of the Christian who has no interest in affairs outside those of faith or church and so does not engage in “*small talk,*” and has no ability to maintain an interesting conversation. In contrast, it envisages opportunities for lively interchanges with non-Christians on topics and in a style which could be expected to find a positive resonance with the conversation partners.

Moreover, such advice envisages a group of Christians in a sufficiently positive relation with the surrounding community for such conversations to be natural; a group not fearful or threatened, but open to and in positive relationship with its neighbors.

Note the individuality of the response in 6b “*know how to respond to each person*”. Our response is not a canned approach but tailored to each individual.

Speaking of individuals Paul concludes this letter with a list of friends – his helpers. Paul accomplished his ministry as he had a little help from his friends.

III. Value Friends Colossians 4:7-18

Why do you think Paul ends with a list of names? What value is there in knowing the names of the people who helped Paul? Why not conclude on some great doctrinal statement or note of praise to God? Why? Because it is people who live out the doctrine. It's people who make *truth* come alive. It's people who do the work of the ministry. As we briefly examine the names on the list my hope is that we will see the value of friendship and cooperation in ministry.

A. Those who were sent 4:7-9

Two are mentioned – Tychicus (pronounced tie-kih-kus or tik-ie-kus in English or tu-khee-kos' in ancient Greek) and Onesimus.

Tychicus – was Asian and most likely from Ephesus. Accompanied Paul when he left Ephesus (Acts 20:4) to help Paul deliver the love offering from the Gentile churches to the saints in Judea. He shared Paul's Roman imprisonment and was chosen by Paul to deliver this letter to the church in Colossae.

He is described as a beloved brother as he was willing to stay with Paul even though the situation was difficult. A faithful servant who both ministered to Paul and for Paul. A fellow bondsman as one who was both a slave of Christ and imprisoned.

His commission was to deliver the letter to the Colossian church, share Paul's circumstances, and be an encouragement to the believers there.

Onesimus – was from Colossae as a runaway slave from Philemon who had come to faith in Christ (most likely through Paul). Paul is now sending him back to Colossae where Philemon lived. The whole story is recorded in Philemon.

He is described as a faithful brother – a worker in the ministry as well as a beloved brother – a friend. He was to add to Tychicus's information and tell the believers what was happening.

Paul sends a free Asian man and a runaway slave to bring the letter to the church. His description of them shows the close relationship he had with them. Culturally there was Paul himself a Jew, Tychicus a Gentile Asian, and Onesimus a runaway slave. These 3 are a microcosm of the church.

B. Those who stayed with Paul 4:10-14

There are 6 people who remained with Paul after he sent Tychicus and Onesimus: 3 are Jews and 3 are Gentiles. The 3 Jews are Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus/Justus. The 3 Gentiles are Epaphras, Luke, and Demas.

The 3 Jews:

Aristarchus – a fellow prisoner who shared Paul's confinement voluntarily. He was from Thessalonica and became a traveling companion of Paul (Acts 19:29). In the Ephesian riot his life was endangered (Acts 19:28-41). He sailed with Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2) and together they experienced the storm and shipwreck. Through all of these circumstances he stayed with Paul.

John Mark (Barnabas' cousin). Writer of the second gospel and a native of Jerusalem. He formerly

deserted Paul on his first missionary journey so Paul refused to take him on the second. Somewhere along the line this estranged relationship was reconciled so that Paul exhorts the church to welcome Mark, should he come. Eventually Mark is a blessing to Paul himself – 2 Tim. 4:11

Jesus/Justus – a Jewish believer who served with Paul about whom we know nothing.

Paul declares that these are the only Jewish believers who are fellow workers for the kingdom of God who were also a great encouragement to Paul himself.

The 3 Gentiles:

Epaphras – he is most likely the founder of the church in Colossae as 1:6-7 tells us that they learned the grace of God from him. He is described as a bondsman of Christ and a fellow servant (1:7). What set him apart and characterized his ministry was prayer. He excelled in his prayer ministry: “*always*” - so that it was continual, consistent and ongoing; “*laboring*” – wrestling and agonizing and was used of an athlete who gives himself fully to his sport; doing so “*earnestly or fervently*”; and his prayers are concerning the believers – “*for you*” with a specific purpose in mind – “*stand fully assured and grow in maturity*” so that in the end they will hear Jesus say “*Well done, good and faithful servant*”. He did all that because he had a deep concern for them and all the believers he knew.

Luke – a beloved physician; the writer of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Traveled extensively with Paul and is included in the “*we*” of Acts. He remained with Paul until the very end (2 Tim. 4:11)

Demas – mentioned 3 times: twice as a fellow laborer; but once, in the end, as a deserter (2 Tim. 4:10).

These 3 Gentiles and the previous 3 Jews were Paul’s friends, those who helped him in ministry. He got by with a little help from his friends.

From those who were sent... to those who stayed... and finally those who received.

C. Those who received 4:15-18

There were the Colossian believers as well as believers in Laodicea; a house church in Nympha’s home and Archippus who was involved in some type of ministry. He may have been the pastor of the church in Colossae (Philemon 2).

There is an interesting statement in vs.16 regarding a letter to the church in Laodicea. The current letter to the Colossians was to be read to the Laodiceans and then the letter to the Laodiceans was to be read to the Colossians. But while we have the letter to Colossians we have no such letter to the church in Laodicea.

We have two possibilities. First is that the letter was lost due to some accident or unavoidable circumstance. This would be similar to the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians which is missing (1 Cor. 5:9). What we call 1 Corinthians was written because they misunderstood the first letter (5:10-13), and because of the information that Chloe and others had given to Paul (1:11; 16:17).

The other possibility is that the letter to or from Laodicea has been preserved under some other name. The most obvious candidate would be Ephesians, so close to Colossians in so many respects and one without a specific address in the earliest original manuscripts. Ephesians was perhaps a circular letter, a letter passed “*from*” church to church rather than addressed to any one church in particular.

Conclusion

We have reached the end of this short letter. Paul started with grace (1:2) and he ends with grace (4:18). May God’s unmerited, freely given favor rest on you! It’s all of grace. Grace for salvation, grace for sanctification,

grace for life. We don't ever earn anything from God. He doesn't owe us kindness. It's all of grace and when we begin to understand that we begin to live out grace in our daily lives.

Our prayers are saturated with grace because we come to the throne of grace; our speech is with grace and our friendships are developed in grace where we encourage, share with, forgive, and support one another in ministry and in life.

So what can you do with all this information?

1. Think about your prayer life and how you can become more devoted to prayer.
2. Think about the words you use in normal everyday life and ask yourself if they are full of grace and seasoned with salt.
3. Think about your friendships and how you can be more supportive and encouraging to the people in your life.

All three of these are interconnected. We pray for people particularly the people we know. The words we use either benefit, support, and encourage our friends or they do the opposite. It is our friends who add joy to our lives. Life is better with friends.