

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

Chapter 4

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

In verse 2, Paul begins by encouraging the Colossians to pray diligently. Many translations says, “*Devote yourselves to prayer*”. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul tells them to “*Pray unceasingly*”. Being devoted to prayer suggests the same idea. He is saying that we are to make it a priority and not something we do last minute or when we have time.

When I was preparing a sermon on prayer, I read books on prayer by Max Lucado and Dr. David Jeremiah. They both said recommended making a prayer journal. Keeping track of your prayers would help you to see what God has done in your prayer concerns. It also helps you make sure that you are taking your important concerns to God.

Paul also writes in verse 2 that when you pray, you should have “*an alert mind and a thankful heart*.” (NLT) Back in chapter 1 of Colossians, Paul prayed twice for the Colossian church with thanksgiving in his heart for them. We teach our children that when someone gives them a gift, they should thank them for it. God has given us numerous gifts, too many to count including salvation through His son, the greatest gift of all.

1 Peter 5:8 says, “*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*” The alert mind would keep you focused on the task at hand, prayer. Satan would tell you not to pray and try to divert your focus.

Prayer has so many purposes. David Jeremiah says that we tend to treat God like a vending machine god. I want this or I want that. Prayer should help you develop a true relationship with the unseen God. Yes, He will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory but there is so much more but it is about building a relationship with God.

In verse 3, Paul asks the members of the Colossian church to pray for him and his ministry. He specifically asks for prayers that God opens the door so that His message is heard.

He says it is the “mystery of Christ”. This is the same mystery that he spoke about to them in Chapter 1. Verses 26 and 27 of Chapter 1 says, “*26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” It is only a mystery to the non-believer, to a believer it shows God's love, grace and mercy.

Do you notice that he points out that he is in chains but he doesn't ask for prayers about being released at all? We tend to lead with that. We pray, "God, please take care of my needs first", but Paul is not.

In verse 4, Paul asks them to pray for the way that he shares the gospel message. He wants to share God's message clearly so that people understand the mystery of Christ.

5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Earlier in this study, I said that we are not a "Go" church in regards to the Great Commission (Chapter 2). Our mission field as Paul points out in verse 5 is the people we see every day, at home, at work and everywhere else we go.

Paul says to "*Be wise*". I take that to mean "Don't alienate the non-believer." "Don't beat them over the head with the gospel message." We are to live in the world and not live like the world. We are to let others see the difference and want it.

In Chapter 2 of Colossians, Paul says don't make Christianity a religion of "don't dos". He lists several "**Do not... do not... do not...**" Being wise means don't make Christianity appear as a legalistic religion with lots of "don't dos". The NLT says it this way, "*Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.*"

Guzik says, "The Christian life isn't only lived in the prayer closet. There also must be practical, lived-out Christianity, which lives wisely toward those who are outside. How we *speak* has a lot to do with this, so we must let our speech always be with grace."

When sharing the gospel message remember that you were in the same boat as the person that you are talking to. If accepting Christ were so easy and trying to live a sinless life were so easy, you would have done it earlier than you did.

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

In these verses we see that Paul is no different than anyone else. He was in chains in prison but the message of Jesus had to continue to go out. Paul had help. If you look at our church, our forefathers set it up with boards and committees for a reason. Everyone must share in the work.

Paul tells the Colossian church that he is sending Tychicus to update them on what is happening where Paul is imprisoned. Tychicus was an assistant of Paul. Just as we saw in the Corinthian letters where Paul sent Timothy and Titus out on his behalf, he is doing the same thing with Tychicus here.

Tychicus is also mentioned in Titus 3:12, “*As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you.*” Paul must have trusted him and got along with him. Remember in Acts that John-Mark left Paul and Barnabas and went home. (Acts 13:13) Then on their next journey, Paul refused to bring John-Mark with them. (Acts 15:37-39). John-Mark is the author of the Gospel of Mark.

It also says that Tychicus will be traveling with Onesimus, who is a Colossian who was traveling with Paul. Onesimus was a runaway slave from Colossae. Philemon 1:10 tells us, “*I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.*” Paul’s letter to Philemon is all about him. Notice that in Philemon 1:10, Paul calls him his son but here Paul calls him our brother. Onesimus became a Christian.

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)
11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

Verse 10 says that “*Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings*”. Aristarchus had been with Paul in Macedonia and in the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29), as well as shipwrecked with Paul (Acts 27:2). All this adversity and he continued to travel with Paul.

John-Mark, who is Barnabas’ cousin, is also present. I assume that he is a visitor because Paul tells them to welcome him if he comes your way. He must be able to travel. Finally, Paul lists Jesus (Jewish name), also called Justus (Roman name). Paul’s group of merry men all say “Hi”.

Paul points out that all three of these men were Jews but now work for the Kingdom of God. Guzik points out that Paul was indeed imprisoned in Rome and he says it was “because of a Jewish riot on the temple mount over the mere mention of God’s offer of grace to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22).” Paul adds that these men give him comfort while he is in prison.

“He gives us a glimpse into his fellowship of encouragement. Verses 7–18 are more than a mere list of names. They are real, ordinary people, who helped Paul carry out an extraordinary ministry for the sake of an extraordinary Savior. We, too, will need others if we are to maintain the vitality in ministry which Paul exemplifies.” (Anders)

12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully

assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Paul started this letter telling the Colossian church that Epaphras sends his greetings. Paul calls him a bondservant of Christ. He says that Epaphras is a prayer warrior. He prays for the church to be “*strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God.*”

Sometimes when someone tells us about their troubles, we say, “I’ll pray for you.” Then for some reason we don’t pray. Same thing with “Tell them I said Hi.” We say we will but fail to do either. Paul and Epaphras appear in these verses to be doing both. Paul is telling them who is present with him and saying Hi for them. He is also telling the church that Epaphras is working hard in prayer on their behalf, as well as the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

He closes the final greetings of this letter by letting the Colossians know that Doctor Luke and Demas are also with Paul and they send their greetings. I am sure that all of these men are Paul’s visitors and not co-inmates with Paul.

Guzik suggests that maybe Dr. Luke was visiting Paul so that he can proofread the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Nothing suggests that this is right.

Demas is mentioned in Philemon 1:24 and 2 Timothy 4:10. In Philemon, he is mentioned as a fellow worker with Paul. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Demas gets the kind of rating from Paul that you don’t want. Paul says, “*he loved this world, has deserted me.*”

In verse 15, Paul asks them to “*Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.*” Paul says, “Say Hi to the Laodicean church members for me.” Whether Nympha is a man or woman, no one knows. In the NIV and most other translations, Nympha is presented as a woman but the KJV says “Nymphas” which is the male for and it says, “in his house.” To me the gender is not important. What is important is the fact that this person opened their house to hold church for others. Our church started in a barn between Alexandria and Granville.

When I see the reference to the Laodicean church, my mind goes to Revelation 3 and Jesus rebuke of this church. If He is speaking to this church at this time then they have a bad reputation. “*15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.*”

16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

In verse 16, Paul tells them that after all of the members of the Colossian church have read the letter then pass it on. He specifies passing it to the Laodicean church but I am sure it was passed on to all of the churches.

Paul references a letter that he wrote to the Laodicean church but there is not one in our Bible. There are lots theories about this missing letter. Barklay says that Paul may have been referring to Paul's letter to the Ephesians which was really meant for the churches of Asia. Guzik says, "We should not assume from this that our treasure of inspiration is incomplete. The Holy Spirit has chosen to preserve those letters that are inspired for the church in a universal sense. Paul was not inspired in this way every time he set pen to paper."

17 Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord."

Paul gives a special note for Archippus. He encouraged him to stand firm and keep the faith. He is also mentioned in Philemon 1:2 which says, "to our sister Apphia, and to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your house." Once again, Paul calls out an individual to give them encouragement. Can you imagine seeing a letter from Paul with your name in it? What an uplifting thing to see that he even knows your name. "Paul knows about our little church?" How uplifting.

18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

And the final verse in the letter to the Colossian church Paul says, "I, Paul, write this *"greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."* Paul wrote this letter himself. He usually dictated his letters. Many of the young men that traveled with Paul started out as scribes. In Romans 16:22, Tertius acted as Paul's scribe, "*I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.*"

As Paul closes this letter, He says "*Remember my chains.*" Robertson says, "The chain clanked afresh as Paul took the pen to sign the salutation. He was not likely to forget it himself." It would be a short time after this letter that Paul would have been beheaded.

"There is much emotion, sorrow, and strength in this simple phrase. Paul not only knew the confinement and loneliness of the prisoner; he also had the uncertainty of not knowing if his case before Caesar's court would end with his execution." (Guzik)