

Colossians 4 :2-18 • Final Comments and Exhortations

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“²Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison — ⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

“⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

“⁷Tychicus will tell you about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

“¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions — if he comes to you, welcome him), and ¹¹Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

“¹³For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’

“¹⁸I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.” (ESV)

Let's open up in prayer. Father in heaven, we thank You for the opportunity today to finish out the Book of Colossians. This has been a fantastic and very insightful study, and we thank You for it, and we pray that the ministry of Your Word would be rich and fulfilling even as we look at these final verses of the chapter. I just pray, my Father, that You would lead us in understanding, insight, and truth. We look to You, Lord, to accomplish all these things. Open our eyes. Open our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

As we get into these last verses of Paul's letter to the Colossians, he ends –we find– this letter, as he ends many of his letters. He uses a quick and broad method of saying as much as he can in the short space that he has left. And the first exhortation that he gives them here in these verses is regarding prayer. And he says to them, and to us, “*2Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*” And I think the words, “Continue steadfastly,” are probably the most important.

It means to be devoted to something in an ongoing way. So be devoted to prayer ongoingly, not just for a moment, not just when your need seems to be the greatest, but all the time. And you can think of it, I suppose, as great effort, steadily applied. I think that is a good way to say it. I honestly think that a lot of Christians forget that prayer is hard work, that it is laborious.

That is not to say that it can't be a joy and a delight. I believe that it can. I believe that many times it is, particularly when we break through in prayer, and we begin to experience a wonderful, glorious understanding of God's presence. In most situations it takes a lot of effort. And so when you hear Christians talk about prayer, it is almost like it ought to be effortless. It ought to be easier than what it is, because people will talk about the difficulty of prayer as if it shouldn't be difficult. “I have been really struggling to just keep praying about this.” Yeah, that's what it is. That's what it is to keep praying.

It is a struggle to keep praying, honestly; I think one of the best ways to think about prayer is a wrestling match. Now, I never wrestled in school. I wrestled with my brother. I should say, he beat me up a lot wrestling. He was two years older and stronger, and we wrestled a lot, so I know a little bit about what wrestling is. But I like to think of prayer in that same way, like wrestling.

In fact, did you notice, as he was talking about Epaphras, did you notice what he said in verse 12 about prayer? Skip down to verse 12 for a moment. Look there. It says, “*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, (and then notice these words: he is) always struggling on your behalf in his prayers.*”

Or here is how the NIV puts it: *“He is always wrestling in prayer for you.”* Isn't that interesting? I think that is a very apt description of prayer, because sometimes prayer is wrestling. Sometimes we are wrestling our flesh. Sometimes we are wrestling the enemy. And sometimes, like Jacob (Genesis 32), we wrestle with God.

But however, it is challenging. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesians? Let me put this up on the screen for you so you can see it. It is from Ephesians, Chapter 6:

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And he says, *“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood (he means other people), but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* It is those things we wrestle against. And prayer is wrestling. It is hard work.

Paul also says to be watchful in prayer. Your Bible may say, be vigilant. The literal Greek means, be wakeful. Isn't that interesting? Be wakeful in prayer. In other words, Paul is really just saying, stay awake. It is the same kind of thing Jesus said to Peter, James, and John when He took them up into the Garden of Gethsemane the night when He was suffering so much before the cross, and He told them to be awake, stay awake. Can't you stay awake and pray with me, even for an hour?(Matthew 26:36-46)

Paul is saying, be wakeful, stay awake. And anyone who has ever prayed over something for a long time knows that this is a genuine concern. Talking to people as I do about the things they pray about, I would have to say that one of the biggest barriers to prayer is people's expectations. I think the number one problem that stands in the way of people praying consistently, vigilantly, is their expectations. We have this way of putting a time limit on God and His answers, and when we think He ought to respond to our prayers. And when He doesn't respond within those time limits that we have set, we become frustrated, we become disappointed, because He hasn't met our expectations.

He didn't say that He was going to answer our prayer in a specific timeframe. We set the timeframe ourselves, and people will say to me, “I prayed about it, but I didn't get an answer. So now what should I do?” And I send them back to

prayer. I say, “Go back and pray. Keep praying until you get the answer. Why did you stop?” Why did you come and say, I prayed, but He didn't answer? No, the response is, He didn't answer yet. And so, you stay with it. You keep going. Luke in his Gospel account recounts a parable that Jesus told during His earthly ministry. And I am not going to get into the parable but let me show you the preface to that parable. It goes like this:

Luke 18:1 (ESV)

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Now that's interesting because Luke, before he gives us the parable, sums it up for us as to why Jesus even told the parable. And that one sentence that he gives there in verse 1 explains to us that we are so prone to giving up that Jesus had to devote an entire parable to encouraging us not to do that, not to give up. Don't stop praying. Don't stop praying. Brothers and sisters in Jesus, can I encourage you today not to stop praying? Don't give up. Keep praying. Keep pressing in.

God hasn't forgotten your prayer. It is not like He is an old man that needs to be reminded because He is getting forgetful. God wants you to persevere. God wants you not to set time limits on Him, but to keep praying. Pray until you have a breakthrough. Pray until you have a breakthrough in prayer; keep praying.

You will notice as Paul goes on in verse 3, he then goes on to ask for prayer for himself and his ministry. He says in verse 3: “*At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak*” and so forth. And so, what is Paul asking for here? He's asking for prayer for open doors. But did you notice he said, for which I am in prison? I want you to think about that for a minute. If you were in prison, and you were writing letters to a church, and you were requesting prayer, what would your prayer request be?

If I had to pose that question to myself, I would probably come back and say, my number one prayer request would probably be, would you please pray that I get out of prison? I mean, just honestly. Isn't it interesting that instead of Paul asking them to pray that he gets out of prison, he asked them to pray for an open door so that he might continue to do what put him in prison in the first place.

And that is, share the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he says pray, please, that I would do it clearly. That I would clearly share the Gospel. So, open doors. He

said, pray for open doors. Pray for the Lord to open doors. Do you think about life like a series of open and closed doors that the Lord has either opened, or the Lord has closed?

Sometimes it is helpful to do that in order to see life from God's perspective. So, what are some of the areas in your life where you need the Lord to open a door? Maybe there is an area or two that you need the Lord to close the door lest you stumble through it on your own, because, when it comes to open doors, we can do that. We can push doors open, or we can try, and some of us have even succeeded. But if you are like me and you are tired of going down that road of futility by pushing doors open on your own, in your own strength, then I would encourage that you take the other road, and that is to make a determination, like Paul is suggesting here, to pray for open doors and then wait for God to open those doors.

I am the first one to admit how incredibly difficult it is to wait for the Lord to open doors. You know what I mean? Oh, man. Waiting is the pits, isn't it? I'm not a good waiter. I'm not a terribly patient person when it comes to having to wait for something. And not only is it hard, but it takes faith.

And that is, I think, the thing that we don't like the most, is that I am having to exercise my faith during that time of waiting. And we really don't like to exercise faith, and it makes us frustrated, and we often want to give up. But let me tell you something that I've learned over my years of walking with the Lord, waiting, as hard as it is, is nothing to the frustration and the heartache that comes from pushing doors open on my own and then dealing with all of the fallout from my self-will exerting itself in a situation and saying, "I'm tired of waiting for God. I'm just going to do this thing. I'm going to make this thing happen." Done it many times. Many times. And it doesn't go well when I become impatient. So let's be encouraged anew, brothers and sisters, to pray for open doors from the Lord and then wait for Him to open them.

Next, Paul says in verse 5, check this out. This is interesting. He says, "*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.*" Walk in wisdom. The Greek word, by the way, for outsiders, in case you are wondering, who is he talking about? Is he talking about people who just don't go to my church? No, the word for outsiders is a very interesting one. Believe it or not, it is not a noun. In the Greek, it means, "those who are away," and it speaks of unbelievers.

Paul exhorts us to be wise in the way we deal with unbelievers. Why? It is because they're watching. They are watching your life. They are watching to see if your life measures up to your words, your talk. In other words, they are

watching to see if you can walk the walk that you so easily talk about. So Paul says we need to be wise. We need to be smart about the way we deal with unbelievers because, Christians, it is easy for you and me to turn unbelievers away from the Lord by our reckless and uncaring talk and actions.

Actions. He's going to talk about talk in just a moment here, but now he's saying, walk in wisdom, walk in a way that is good and right in front of unbelievers. He says that we are to also make *"the best use of the time."* It's interesting. This phrase in the Greek literally means, buying up opportunities. And elsewhere, we were told in the Scriptures to make the most of every opportunity.

And then our words are very important too. Notice verse 6: He says, *"Let your speech always be gracious."* Boy, there's a tough one. Let your speech always be gracious, or, if you will, full of grace. Are your words full of grace around unbelievers? You say, what do you mean by that? I'm talking about words that are marked by kindness. Words that are marked by compassion toward people, toward others. When an unbeliever hears you talk, do they hear you using those kinds of words full of grace? Or do they hear your words as full of criticism, full of anger, full of bitterness, even? That can turn people away when they find out that you're a believer.

So rather than our words being harsh and biting, they need to be full of a gentle spirit. They need to be words that give encouragement, reconciliation, restoration. Those are the kind of words that ought to be coming out of our mouth. And then notice that he says, concerning our words, that they should be *"seasoned with salt."*

This was a figurative kind of a phrase that is used to describe how our conversation ought to be flavored with wit and intelligence and insight. If you can't respond with intelligence and insight, then don't respond. It's interesting, if you watch or you listen to these discussion forums online, whether it is on Facebook or some discussion forum of some kind where somebody poses a question, and they are looking for specific information, and they'll say, "Hey, Has anybody had any experience doing such and such, dealing with such and such, because I need to know how this works and such."

And what you get, you have to wade through all these comments from people who comment about this without having any idea about what this person is seeking information about. And they'll even say, "Well, my guess is..." or, (they'll even say that) "I would think, or my..." No, no, no, I wasn't asking for what you might think or what your guess is. I'm looking for people who have

experience knowing this thing. When people are talking to you about eternal matters, life and death issues, we don't guess. We don't just throw it out there and say, "Well... Here's what I think..." We speak with intelligence and insight that is based in the Word of God. The insight that comes from the Scriptures. That's the way we should be responding. So let your words be seasoned with salt in such a way that people are left to thirst for more because you have given a good response, an intelligent response.

He goes on to tell us why to do that: "*so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*" Listen, it is through intelligence and insight that you are going to understand how to tailor your response to the person to whom you are speaking, because the answer that you give to one person may not be the same exact way that you form that response to another person. Now, be careful. Hear me. Right here. I'm not talking about changing the Gospel. The Gospel is always the Gospel. Jesus is always the Savior. Sinners are always sinners, and our need of a Savior is always the same.

However, the way we talk to different people about those truths, which do not change, the way we talk about them does change, depending on who the person is and how they hear, how they listen, and how they assimilate information based on their background. The answer that you give to someone about a matter of the Bible or eternity might be very different to the person who has never, ever darkened the door of a church in their life to the answer that you give to somebody who was raised in Mormonism, for example, or the answer that you give someone who was raised in Roman Catholicism, but now is wanting to know about Biblical Christianity. You're going to respond differently. You're going to talk differently. You're going to frame the truths that are unchanging in different ways, depending on the ability of the person you are talking to to hear you.

Paul talked about this. He talked about it in 1 Corinthians. Can I show you this on the screen? He talked about the way we relate to people. He said:

1 Corinthians 9:20-23 (ESV)

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

“To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win the Jews. (And what he is saying there is that I speak to Jews in language that they get, that they understand. He says) To those under the law, I became as one under the law (in other words, I relate to them from a place of understanding. He says,) (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.”

(And then he says) *“To those outside the law, (in other words, that they never heard the law, they don't understand the law, he says) I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ) (in other words, I don't change the fundamental truth of who I am, but he says, I do this) that I might win those outside the law.”*

(And then he goes on to say,) *“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”*

Christians, let me be clear about this. 1 Corinthians 9, the passage we just read, is not a proof text for you to go out and sin like a sinner that you might save sinners. It is not telling you that you can go out and live like they live in order to reach them for the Gospel. When Paul said to those outside the law, I become as one outside the law, he mentioned then parenthetically: (although I am not outside God's law, in fact, I am under Christ's law,) which is the law of love and the law of being led by the Spirit and so forth.

I don't change who I am and how I live from the standpoint of living my life to please the Lord, but I relate to people where they're at, right where they're at. I talk to them about the things that are going on in their lives. I talk to them in ways that they understand. I relate the Gospel in ways they are going to understand.

Paul gives us some insights here on how to talk to the unsaved. Let me put these up in bullet points, so we can do them kind of in a way of summary:

- *Walk in wisdom*
- *Use time wisely*
- *Speak words of grace*
- *Be intelligent and insightful*
- *Give the right answer*

Walk in wisdom, make the best use of the time that you have, making the most of every opportunity that God gives you. Speak words that are full of grace, full

of compassion, full of life. Let your words be intelligent and insightful, and then know how to give the right answer to the right person, talking to them where they are.

Now, Paul ends this letter with some personal notes and greetings. Notice he says, “*Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.*” Tychicus is the person who obviously delivered this letter, along with perhaps some other brothers to the church in Colossae. He says that, “*he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant.*” Read verse 8 again: “*I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that (also) he may encourage your hearts.*”

But then he goes on in verse 9, and he says, “*and with him, (in other words, sending with him) Onesimus.*” And Onesimus has an entire story unto himself. You will remember that Onesimus was that runaway slave who ran away from his master. Guess where his master lived? Colossae. A man by the name of Philemon. And Onesimus ran away. He ran to Rome, and who do you suppose he runs into in Rome? The Apostle Paul. What do you suppose happens when he runs into the Apostle Paul? He hears the Gospel. What do you suppose happens to Onesimus? He gets saved, and he becomes a precious brother. And so Onesimus is traveling back to Colossae with a letter in hand, addressed to Philemon from Paul, a very personal letter which we have in the Bible, explaining that Onesimus, his former runaway slave, is now returning as a full brother in the faith.

Beautiful, beautiful story. I want you to notice that Paul refers to Onesimus here at the end of verse 9, as “*our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you,*” and he says they, and he is obviously talking about these brothers that are traveling together. “*They will tell you of everything that has taken place here,*” and he is probably talking about how Onesimus came to Christ.

Verse 10, “*Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you.*” We don't really know that much about Aristarchus other than the fact that he was arrested for doing his work of serving the Lord and was a fellow prisoner of Paul. “*...and Mark (he writes) the cousin of Barnabas, (and he says,) (concerning whom you have received instructions— if he comes to you, welcome him),* and he is talking here about John Mark.

He is the young man and the relative of Barnabas who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but who abandoned them just barely into that missionary journey and went home. And you will remember that in the Book of Acts later, when they decided to go out a second time, Barnabas

wanted to take John Mark along, but Paul didn't think it was a good idea. And so, they couldn't come to any kind of an agreement regarding John Mark. And so, they decided to part ways, and Barnabas took John Mark, and he went to the island of Cyprus, and Paul took Silas, his new traveling partner, and went a different direction back toward the churches that they had planted (Acts 15:37-41).

What's interesting here now is that at this point in Paul's ministry, we now see that he is once again connected with John Mark. And he is writing about him and he tells the Colossians that if John Mark arrives to welcome him. Verse 11, he says, “...and Jesus who is called Justus.” Again, we don't know much about this man other than the fact that he was Jewish. In fact, Paul says, “*These are the only men of the circumcision (and that's a way of saying they are the only Jews) among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.*” Verse 12, “*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you.*”

Remember, Epaphras is the one who brought the Gospel to Colossae. He's the one who first proclaimed the Gospel there. We read about that in the first chapter of this letter. And then this is where he talks about Epaphras who always struggles in prayer on their behalf that they might “*stand mature and fully assured*” and so forth. He says, verse 13, “*For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.*”

We all need an Epaphras in our life, don't we, who is willing to wrestle in prayer and work hard. We need those people. We need those people. Are you an Epaphras? Do you love to pray and just want to serve the Lord with all your heart? We need you in the body of Christ.

Verse 14 says, “*Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.*” Of course, we know who Luke is, the beloved doctor, author of the Gospel that bears his name, also the author of the Book of Acts. Demas, we know as well. We know that he was a traveling companion of Paul, but we know from Paul's second letter to Timothy, that while Paul was in Rome incarcerated, that Demas actually abandoned Paul, which is pretty sad. Ran off, because it says, Paul even said, because he loved the world (2 Timothy 4:10).

Verse 15, “*Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.* ¹⁶*And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.*”

We don't have Paul's letter to the church of Laodicea. Unfortunately, it has been lost. I'm sure it contains everything we have ever questioned and couldn't come to conclusions on. But for some reason in God's infinite grace and wisdom, we no longer have that letter. And then he says in verse 17: *“And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’”*

Again, we don't really know much about Archippus. He is mentioned in Paul's short letter to Philemon (verse 2). But whoever Archippus was, he is a man whom Paul cared enough about what God had given him to do, to exhort the whole church to encourage Archippus to finish that work. Isn't that interesting? And for Paul, this was not an entirely uncommon exhortation.

He gave one very similar to Timothy. Let me show you from 2 Timothy 1, verse 6. He says:

2 Timothy 1:6 (ESV)

...I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,

In other words, keep going. Do what the Lord gave you to do. Complete the work of the ministry. Sometimes we need that reminder to get back to it, don't we?

Get back to it because there are all kinds of reasons that we can leave the ministry, leave things unfinished. We have all been given work to do. Have you left your work unfinished? It can happen. Sometimes we just get tired, and we stop. Sometimes, we get frustrated, and we quit. Sometimes we get distracted. Sometimes we get attacked and frightened off. That happened to me when I was a brand-new believer. The enemy attacked in a very vicious way, and I just about ran off, thinking I would be better off without those kinds of attacks in my life. But whatever it may be, whatever God has given you to do, the exhortation to you and me is, finish it. Finish the work.

Paul ends by saying, verse 18, *“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.”* And his distinctive penmanship was his sign of personal authenticity. And then he closes with these words, which is even a further sign or mention of his authenticity; he says, *“Remember my chains.”* Remember my chains.

Interesting to say such a thing, isn't it? William Barclay in his commentary wrote that Paul was in no way asking for sympathy when he said, Remember my chains. He wasn't saying remember that I'm hurting, and I really need help.

That's not what Paul is doing here. He is actually calling their attention to his chains as a way of saying this is my authority. This is my badge.

Paul dealt with the suffering which he had in his life as a sign of authority, that he was doing what Christ had called him to do. Do you remember what he said to the Galatians? It is very similar. Galatians, Chapter 6, he says:

Galatians 6:17 (ESV)

...let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

It is a great statement, but it is much the same sentiment. Don't let anybody cause me any trouble, because, if you are wondering whether I have the authority or the authenticity in my life to do what I do, I bear in my body the marks of Jesus.

And he ends this letter as he often ends by saying, ¹⁸*“Grace be with you.”* Grace. Grace be with you. God's unmerited favor. We don't have God's favor in our life because we have earned it. That is not grace. That's not grace. Grace is unmerited. Grace is unearned. Something you didn't do to get. God just gives it because He loves you. And with that, we finish our study of the Book of Colossians.

It has been a wonderful study, hasn't it? Let's close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank You so much for the Book of Colossians. Lord, You allowed Paul to spend time in prison and write many letters which have blessed us so richly throughout the years. And we are so thankful, Lord, that You are faithful to minister to Your church and to speak words of grace and insight that we might know how to live.

And Lord, Colossians helps us to know how to live for You, how to speak to others, how to love others, what kind of hearts we ought to have. And it encourages us to walk in the Spirit. Help us, Lord, to do that. It doesn't come naturally. Lord, it comes supernaturally. And we need a supernatural impartation of Your Spirit to empower us to walk as we ought, living our lives in front of the world so that they might see Jesus.

Open their eyes, Lord God, and open doors. Open doors that we can share the Gospel and do it clearly as we ought. We thank You, and we praise You, Father God. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.