

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Chapter Four

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Live as a New Man (3:10-4:6)

¹ ***Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.***

- An earthly master is not permitted to act as an unjust tyrant towards his servants. Instead, he is commanded to be “*just and fair*” to those who serve him (**Ecc. 5:8**).
- *“That which is just and equal: proper food and raiment, which is sufficient and fitting for them; the wages due unto them by law or contract; using them with gentleness and humanity, taking care of them when under affliction, and in sickness; encouraging the diligent and laborious by an addition to their salaries; correcting the disobedient within just bounds, not with too much rigour and severity; and carrying it with an even hand to all, not preferring or indulging one before another, without any reason:” (Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, Colossians, p.114).*
- A master must possess the same characteristics as his servant (**Eph. 6:5-8**).
- A master must not demand anything from a servant that he would not do himself (**Matt. 7:12**).
- Such is logical since an earthly master, though he has a position of rank on earth, is just like his servants in being subject to the “*Master in heaven.*”

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Live as a New Man (3:10-4:6)

² Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;

- An active prayer life is a must for the “*new man*” in Christ.
 - The Colossians were already active in prayer, as evident by Paul’s expression “*continue earnestly in prayer,*” but they needed to remain “*vigilant,*” or “*alert*” (NASB).
 - “*In our persistent prayers our spiritual faculties must be in active exercise. We must, while we pray, be keenly alive to our own needs and dangers and the promises of God. To be awake is to be alive in the fullest sense, to have all the powers of perception and action in readiness. The activity of the soul in prayer is to be both energetic and incessant*” (David Lipscomb and J.W. Shepherd, *Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, p.307).
- Furthermore, their prayers needed to be marked by “*thanksgiving.*”
 - Ceaseless praise should flood the ceaseless prayers of the “*new man*” (**1 Thess. 5:16-18**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

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³ meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, ⁴ that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

- Earlier, Paul expressed that he and his companions were constant in prayer on behalf of the Colossians (**Col. 1:9**). Now, Paul specifically requested the Colossians pray for them.
- Paul was “*in chains*” as he wrote the epistle (**Col. 1:24, 4:10**). Yet, he did not request prayers of deliverance. Instead, Paul requested two things, both in reference to the spread of the gospel.

1) “*God would open to us a door for the word.*”

- Even while imprisoned, Paul recognized there were great opportunities for him and his companions to teach the gospel (**Phil. 1:12-14; Acts 16:23-34**).

2) “*I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.*”

- Paul wished to boldly and plainly speak the right things the right way (**Eph. 6:20; Acts 9:27, 19:8, 26:26; 1 Pet. 4:11**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Live as a New Man (3:10-4:6)

5a Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside,

- Those who have been created anew in Christ must realize how important it is to “walk” carefully and with “*wisdom toward those who are outside.*”
 - The world will seek to falsely accuse us or make accusations out of bad faith to hurt our influence (**1 Pet. 2:11-12**).
 - The world may slander and persecute us, but we must not provide the world any fuel to add to their vindictive fires (**1 Thess. 5:22; Matt. 5:14-16**).
 - “*We should use some wisdom in dealing with those who are not Christians. We should stop and think about how our words and actions will be taken. What kind of impression are we leaving by the things we say and do? Even when we do things that are right within themselves, we may leave the wrong impression before others. Good judgment must be used in all our dealings with others*” (Donnie Rader, *The Book of Colossians*, p.54-55).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Live as a New Man (3:10-4:6)

5b redeeming the time.

- Christians must ensure we are properly “*redeeming the time*.”
 - We must take advantage of the “*time*,” i.e. opportunities, that God presents to us (**Gal. 6:10**).
 - Contextually, Paul’s point seems to be that we should take advantage of opportunities to spread the gospel to “*those who are outside*” (**v.5a**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Live as a New Man (3:10-4:6)

⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

- As we speak, we must ensure that our “speech” is:
 - “*With grace.*”
 - Language that is grace-filled will not be laced with disdain, arrogance, and condescension. Rather, grace-filled speech will be filled with love, humility, and compassion.
 - “*They will be words that are not abusive or vindictive, but speech that is loving and caring*” (Walton Weaver, *Philippians, Colossians*, p.587).
 - In contrast to corrupt communications, grace-filled-speech can spiritually edify a person (**Eph. 4:29**).

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⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

- As we speak, we must ensure that our “speech” is:
 - “Seasoned with salt.”
 - To season something is to make it more palatable.
 - “Salt” preserves rather than corrupts.
 - This expression does not suggest that we should compromise the truth to make the gospel more palatable (**2 Tim. 4:3-4**).
 - Instead, salt-seasoned-speech is indicative of language being spoken in a loving way that is palatable to the listener (**Eph. 4:15**).

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⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

- As we speak, we must ensure that our “speech” is:
 - “Able to answer everyone in the way you should” (NCV).
 - We must determine how to respond to every person individually. Although there are blanket truths, blanket responses do not always suit the needs of “each one.”
 - “Each answer must be suited to the specific needs of the person asking the question. The disposition of mind of the one asking the question, the tone of the question, the content of it, as well as its intent — all such matters must be taken into consideration if one is to answer in the best way” (Walton Weaver, *Philippians, Colossians*, p.588).
 - For the Colossians, they would especially need to be able to respond individually to each “outsider” who sought to draw them away from Christ (**Col. 2:8**).
 - We bear the same responsibility today (**1 Pet. 3:15**).

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Live as a New Man (3:10-4:6)

⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

- Although the previous verse indicates that Paul specifically had in view our manner of speaking with unbelievers, the truth of this verse is equally applicable in how we should speak with fellow believers.
- In the age of social media, Christians should pay special care to how they speak to and among “*outsiders*,” both in terms of what we personally say and in terms of what we share that was originally penned by another person (**Rom. 1:32; 1 Tim. 5:22**).
- How effective will we be in spreading the gospel to “*outsiders*” if they see our social media accounts riddled with corruptive language (**James 3:10**)?
- Just as Paul petitioned for prayers to speak as he ought (**Col. 4:4**), we should regularly pray that we too would only speak those things which satisfy God.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-14)

⁷ *Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.*
⁸ *I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts,*

- Paul described Tychicus as “*a beloved brother*,” “*faithful minister*,” and “*fellow servant in the Lord*.”
- Tychicus would inform the Colossians of the latest “*news*” about Paul, update them on Paul’s “*circumstances*,” and “*comfort*” their “*hearts*.”
- Tychicus played an important role in Paul’s ministry.
 - He accompanied Paul during his third missionary journey (**Acts 20:4**);
 - He visited Ephesus on multiple occasions, having delivered Paul’s epistle to them, and provided encouragement to the church (**Eph. 6:21-22; 2 Tim. 4:12**).
 - He delivered the letter to Colossae (**Col. 4:8-9**);
 - He possibly went to Crete to provide Paul’s orders to Titus (**Tit. 3:12**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-14)

***⁹ with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.
They will make known to you all things which are happening here.***

- Like Tychicus, Paul described Onesimus as being “*faithful*” and a “*beloved brother*.” He too would inform the Colossians of Paul’s plight at the time of writing.
- Onesimus was apparently a member of the Colossian church, hence the phrase “*one of you*.”
- Onesimus was a slave who served under his believing master Philemon.
 - Onesimus had fled from Philemon, only to be converted by Paul (**Phile. 8-10**).
 - Onesimus eventually went back to Colossae to serve under his master (**Phile. 12-14**). Paul is likely referring to his return trip in this verse.
 - Philemon was instructed to receive Onesimus as a brother, both in the flesh and in the Lord (**Phile. 16**), showing the equality in Christ between bondservants and masters.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-14)

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),

- Aristarchus and Mark are also listed together in **Phile. 24**.
- Paul described Aristarchus as his “*fellow prisoner*.”
 - He may have been imprisoned with Paul, but this could be a figurative expression alluding to assistance he provided Paul (**Acts 27:1-2**).
 - He was with Paul during the riot in Ephesus (**Acts 19:29**).
 - He also traveled with Paul throughout Greece (**Acts 20:4**).
- Mark is listed here, who was the cousin of Barnabas.
 - We believe this is the one who penned the Gospel of Mark.
 - This is most likely John Mark, who played a key role in Paul’s ministry until eventually departing during Paul’s first missionary journey until eventually departing before returning to work with Barnabas (**Acts 13:2-13, 15:36-40**).
 - The Colossians were instructed to “*welcome him*,” showing Paul’s respect for Mark (**2 Tim. 4:11**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-14)

11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

- Jesus, or Justus, is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible.
 - Two other men, one surnamed Justus and another named Justus, are mentioned in Acts.
 - **Acts 1:23** – Given his official name (Joseph, called Barsabas), we know for certain the man surnamed Justus is a different person than the one in **Col. 4:11**.
 - **Acts 18:7** – It is also unlikely this man is the same person described in **Col. 4:11** because the Justus mentioned here appears to have been a Gentile (**Acts 18:5-6**).
- Justus was commended as being a Jewish (*“of the circumcision”*) worker alongside Paul in God’s kingdom.
 - Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus were the *“only fellow workers”* of Paul who were Jewish. All three men provided *“comfort”* to him.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-114)

¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

- Paul described Epaphras as a “*bondservant of Christ*.”
- He was a native Colossae (“*one of you*”).
 - Some suggest Epaphras was responsible for the gospel spreading there, and some internal evidence supports this theory (**Col. 1:7, 2:1**).
- Given the fact that Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus were Paul’s only fellow workers who were Jewish (**Col. 4:11**), it is necessary to assume Epaphras was a Gentile.
- Epaphras was a faithful servant of the Lord (**Col. 1:7**), as well as Paul’s fellow prisoner (**Phile. 23**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-14)

***13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you,
and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.***

- Although Epaphras was imprisoned alongside Paul, he continued to exhibit “*great zeal*” for his brethren by “*laboring fervently in prayers.*”
 - Specifically, he prayed that they would “*perfect and complete in all the will of God.*”
 - Such prayers would be especially helpful given the false teachers who were trying to draw the Colossians and surrounding Christians away from Christ.
- It is also possible that Epaphras played a part in establishing the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis since the cities were all located in the Lycus Valley and were settled within 12 miles of Colossae.
 - Even if he did not establish the churches, Epaphras obviously had some association with them given the reference to his “*zeal*” for them.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Personal Greetings (4:7-14)

14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

- Paul described Luke as *“the beloved physician.”*
 - We have all reason to assume this Luke is the person who penned both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.
 - Luke traveled with Paul during his second and third missionary journeys (**Acts 16:10-12, 20:5-6, 21:18, 27:1**).
 - Unlike so many others, Luke was a loyal supporter of Paul, having stood by him never to forsake him (**2 Tim. 4:11**).
 - In contrast, Demas later forsook Paul (**2 Tim. 4:10**).
 - *“From the fact that Demas is mentioned here without a word of praise while the others received commendations in various ways, many interpreters have concluded that already his true character was beginning to appear, and that Paul did not have full confidence in him” (David Lipscomb and J.W. Shepherd, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, p.317).*

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Closing Exhortations (4:15-18)

15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.

- After providing the Colossians with greetings from other brethren, Paul requested they relay his own greetings to the Laodiceans.
 - This is the same church who later received condemnation from Christ for their lukewarmness (**Rev. 3:16**).
- Paul also requested the Colossians send greetings to “*Nymphas and the church that is in his house.*”
 - Debate exists as to whether the expression “*church that is in his house*” refers to a church who assembled in Nymphas’s home or those in his family who were members of the church.
 - Whomever Paul intended, he wished for them to receive his greetings.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Closing Exhortations (4:15-18)

16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

- The epistle addressed to Colossae was also intended to be read to the Laodiceans. Likewise, the letter to the Laodiceans was intended to be read by the Colossians.
- Many wonder about the canonicity of the Laodicean letter.
 - If this letter was/is a necessary part of the New Testament canon, then we trust it survived and is included in our Bibles via another name.
 - *“We have no way to know definitively know what letter is meant. Several theories have been offered but none can be proven unequivocally. Scholars seem to believe that the letter to the Ephesians was intended to be circulated throughout the churches of Asia, and that this is the letter to be read ‘from Laodicea’” (Robert Harkrider, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, p.145).*

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16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

- Whatever the case, we can see from this text that the contents of New Testament epistles would be repeated to Christians in other places.
 - The physical letters themselves would often circulate throughout churches in the region (**2 Cor. 1:1; James 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Rev. 1:4**).
 - Although New Testament epistles addressed specific problems in specific churches, the contents of the letters were applicable to every saint in every city (**1 Cor. 1:2**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Closing Exhortations (4:15-18)

17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

- Archippus was a fellow soldier in the Lord's army (**Phile. 2**).
- More specifically, he was involved in the "*ministry*" of the gospel.
 - We do not know for certain if he was a preacher who spoke through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All we know is that the Colossians needed to encourage Archippus to "*finish the work the Lord called him to do*" (NLV).
 - Compare this verse with **1 Tim. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 4:1-4**.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Closing Exhortations (4:15-18)

18 This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

- Signing off the letter with his signature “*grace be with you*” salutation (**2 Thess. 3:17-18**), Paul requested the Colossians to “*remember*” his “*chains*.”
 - He suffered as he wrote this epistle, yet all he asked from his brethren was to “*remember*,” or pray, for him.
 - He did not request their sympathy, nor did he request they enlist people to break him out of his confinement. Instead, Paul simply asked that they would bring his situation before God the Father in prayer, knowing the power of doing so (**James 5:16**).
 - Such a simple yet powerful closing request from such a simple yet powerful man.