

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

COL. 4:1 Masters, give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of

Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

6 Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

NOTES

Large empty rounded rectangular box for taking notes.

Live in Light of the Gospel

Lesson Text: Colossians 4:1-6

Related Scriptures: Mark 14:37-41;
Ephesians 5:15-20; 6:5-9, 18-20; II Thessalonians 3:1-5

TIME: A.D. 60

PLACE: from Rome

GOLDEN TEXT—"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5).

Lesson Exposition

RELATIONSHIPS WITH SERVANTS—Col. 4:1

Separating Colossians 4:1 from the preceding context is a case where the chapter division may not be helpful.

There was a range of servitude within the Greco-Roman world. Some served as dignitaries, high-ranking servants to their masters. Others were subjected to harsh treatment as abject slaves, without any rights. Some slaves may have preferred the security afforded to them by belonging to their masters.

In any case, Paul therefore warned believing masters to graciously provide whatever was right and fair. They were to avoid being arbitrary or oppressive. They were also to be impartial in their relationships with them. They needed to recognize that their slaves were human and created in the image of God. They needed to do so because they too had a Master—a Master in heaven, who rules over all, a supreme Master. They served the Lord Jesus Christ, so they were to follow His example.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LORD'S SERVANTS—Col. 4:2-4

Earnest prayer (Col. 4:2). Paul had set high standards for the Colossian believers in the previous chapter. First, they needed to persistently pray. This type of prayer life should be characterized by watchfulness. We are "to stay awake" and show spiritual alertness. We need that kind of prayer life in light of the wicked world we live in.

We should also be alert to answered prayers and quick to express gratitude for them. We are to have a worshipful attitude toward God as we express our gratitude.

Specific prayer (Col. 4:3-4). It was Paul's desire that the Colossians remember him and his coworkers in their prayers. This is a reminder that our prayers should not be centered on ourselves. We should spend much of our prayer time lifting others and their needs to God. It is especially important to pray for those in the Lord's work, such as pastors and missionaries. They are constant targets of the evil one.

Paul desired that God would open doors of opportunity for him and his coworkers. We sometimes use this fig-

ure of speech too. God can open doors whenever He pleases, and we should be prepared to move ahead.

Although Paul was held as a prisoner at the time, he was still looking for opportunities to preach the gospel to people around him. He was especially interested in being able to explain “the mystery of Christ” (vs. 3). He had spoken of this mystery earlier (1:24-28). There he explained that the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, had become a reality because of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to spread that message. He felt compelled to do so.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH UNBELIEVERS—Col. 4:5-6

Walking in wisdom (Col. 4:5). When Paul told the Colossian believers they should walk in wisdom, he was emphasizing the importance of a consistently pure life. We dare not let down and fail, for there will always be devastating results (even though at times we will not be aware of them). We can turn unbelievers away from the Lord.

Once again, we realize the importance of a good prayer life. We must realize our dependence on Him if we are to succeed at keeping such a high standard.

Jesus may return at any time, making it extremely important for us to redeem the time. This means to make the most of every opportunity that comes our way.

Speaking with grace (Col. 4:6). The speech of believers is to be gracious at all times. This is often tested by those who are rude or accuse us. It is tempting to answer back as harshly as we are being addressed. Some of us struggle with speaking rudely to others. This is not the way the Lord wants us to react, however. We must remember that Jesus did not treat us the way that we deserved, but died for us while we were still His enemies (cf. Rom. 5:8).

Paul also said that our speech is to be seasoned with salt. Salt is known for two particular qualities. It was used extensively for preserving food, keeping it from spoiling. This indicates that our speech should be pure and wholesome, without corruption. In fact, we should prevent corruption from spreading. Salt also enhances the flavor of food. That might indicate that our speech should be something that draws people to us. When our speech is gracious, wholesome, and appealing, we will be effective in drawing the attention of unbelievers to our Lord. Without prayer, this entire endeavor is impossible.

—Keith E. Eggert

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Paul most likely referring to when he spoke of “servants” (Col. 4:1)?
2. What is the overriding reason masters were to treat their slaves with compassion?
3. How did Paul express the idea that we should pray persistently?
4. In praying, what does it mean to “watch” (vs. 2)?
5. What did Paul say we should often include in our prayers?
6. What does Paul’s request tell us about what our prayer life should include?
7. What was the specific request that Paul wanted the Colossian believers to pray about on his behalf?
8. Before whom are we to be careful to walk in wisdom?
9. Why is this kind of behavior important?
10. What kind of speech are we to have, and what will it accomplish?

—Keith E. Eggert

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Treating a servant or an employee with respect is important for all employers (Col. 4:1).
2. We should give thanks in prayer frequently (vs. 2).
3. No matter our circumstances, we should pray for opportunities to share the gospel (vs. 3).
4. We should pray that pastors can declare the gospel clearly (vs. 4).
5. Christians are Christ's representatives to the world and should use time wisely (vs. 5).
6. We should speak wisely and graciously to others (vs. 6).

—Anne Adams

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does an employer, or "master," serve Christ by treating employees/servants fairly and kindly? How should the Christian employer deal with a bad worker?
2. What should we do when it feels like no doors are open to us? If doors are closed, does it mean we have done something wrong?
3. How should we pray for people in full-time Christian ministry? Give examples of people who served God in unusual ways because of the prayers of others.
4. Do you feel more gifted in witnessing to unbelievers or in encouraging fellow Christians? If you could improve on only one of these, which would you choose? Why?
5. How can we be sure that what we say does not unnecessarily offend someone?

—Anne Adams

Golden Text Illuminated

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5).

Christians are to live responsibly and righteously. Our lives should reflect who Christ is in all that we do. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:16-17).

It is easy to live as a Christian when you are around Christians; but when we are out in the world, the challenge may be great. A Christian needs to be an influence among people; otherwise, how will others ever know what a Christian is? "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

When we redeem our time, we are making use of something valuable, making every moment count.

One of the best ways of witnessing is by example rather than by debate. We should not do anything to cast doubt on our character as Christians.

If you were living in a place where Christians were being persecuted for their faith, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Being a Christian is not part-time work. It is to include a continual display of our values. Sometimes this means standing alone and being different from others.

We are missionaries to our society, friends, and family. People need to see a consistent witness in our walk that would cause them to want the same life-changing experience of Christ.

—George A. Downes