

Colossians 4:2–6 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 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— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Colossians 4:2-6 | Prayer & Action

Much of the instruction to the church until now has been about their interaction with one another. How they are to take off those old ways of being which create foolish divisions among them. How in their focus on Christ alone they will not add strange new barriers to their fellowship, but in their absolute recognition of Christ as all and in all they might see above their petty distinctions and hold fast to one another as they hold fast to Christ.

But here, Paul calls them to turn outward towards the world and he invites the Colossians into the very mission Paul is on towards the Colossians. They are no longer mere recipients but participants. Remember Paul is writing to a newly established church and he is pulling for their maturity in Christ. That they might continue in the gospel, the very thing which brought them to Christ in the first place. But Paul is not waiting until they graduate to his level of being on mission. He is telling them in their current state, they are on the very mission that Christ is on. To make manifest the mystery of God, Christ in you.

To be a Christian is to be on a mission and to be a Christian is to participate in that mission. For a church to lose this focus is to cease to be a church. One of my least favorite types of church conversations are those which participate in the false dichotomy of the church being either for Christians or for non-Christians. The very shape of that dichotomy undermines the nature of the church. Is an embassy for the nation it is from or for the nation it is in? If one or the other is picked then the embassy ceases to be an embassy. Grasping this dynamic is to grasp the nature of this the church age.

When the steward was removed from the throne for the gross way he ate grape tomatoes, Aragorn is crowned King of Gondor. The enemy was defeated, and Aragorn truly was king. But when the Hobbits make their way back to the shire, they find everyone is still living under the supposed rule of the wicked forces of middle earth. So the Hobbits proclaim that they have a good king now, and then work to see the principles of their true king established in the shire. That is a picture of the church age. Lord your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

So the church by her very nature is an institution which participates in the reality of Christ's reign. The reality of Christ's reign is universal, therefore it concerns all people. Those within the church and those outside the church. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. How? Prayer and action.

1. Prayer

Paul's call to prayer is a general encouragement and a personal request. First the general encouragement to prayer.

Colossians 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Prayer is to be the steadfast work of the Christian. So many aspects of the Christian life are a mere reframing of the life you had lived before. But one absolute essential is prayer. A non-praying Christian is an oxymoron. Consider, we have been reconciled to God in Christ. We have been given his Spirit to enter his presence and commune with our God. How can you claim these truths without participating in them by that most simple and essential conversational pathway to God which is prayer. His ear is ever attuned, he promises whatever we ask in Jesus name so that our joy might be complete. He promises his peace which surpasses all understanding in our supplication. Here is how we ought to pray.

Steadfastly: Prayer is a game of perseverance. One which requires consistent effort and work. It must be disciplined into our lives and not abandoned for the sake of some other more seemingly effective means of accomplishing God's purposes.

Jesus's descriptions of steadfastness in prayer are shocking. He tells stories of a woman incessantly nagging a judge into action on her behalf, and says this is a good model of prayer. He tells the story of a man imposing himself in the middle of the night upon his neighbor so that the mere discomfort of the situation might compel his neighbor into getting up and giving him some bread. And then he says this is a good model for prayer. These are dogged examples. These are coffee is for closers only examples of prayer. Pray to God. Demand it of yourself.

Watchfulness: Now remember the dual nature of the church age we were previously discussing. We are shaped by the reality of Christ's rule over all all things, and we are likewise in enemy territory. Even in our own fleshly natures! So our prayer must have a watchfulness about it. Like we're stationed in a tower, we need to have our eyes opened to the approach of enemies and dangers which lurk around every turn.

Don't just introspect, pray! Don't just despair about the state of the world, pray! This can be one of the most challenging aspects of prayer because prayer requires looking and our hearts and the world are hard places to look at. But this watchfulness in prayer shapes our eyes, and brings theses generic facts of reality into the true narrative of history which is Christ's redemption of the world.

Likewise this watchfulness in prayer is to be infused with thanksgiving. Pray and then watch. Expect to see the answer to your prayers. Don't you see this is shaping your mind to be able to see God's work in the world. God seems absent because you don't participate with him in his action in the world. Watchfulness is both how we pray and prayer is how our eyes are shaped so that we can be watchful.

Open your eyes and pray. Your child woke up safe and healthy, because you prayed you do not right it off as happenstance instead you give thanks to God. You once again received your daily bread, and because you prayed you give thanks. You received discernment over a difficult issue. You survived that brutal meeting. You're mistakes didn't lead to absolute destruction. Your friend asked you about Jesus, finally! Be watchful in these things and give thanks.

Now this prayerful disposition also involves a particular request from Paul.

Colossians 4:3 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—

Pray for those who make it their work to proclaim the gospel. How is it that I contextualize to our current culture a request like this of Paul's? Simple I ask you to pray for myself and the leaders of our church. Charles Spurgeon when asked why his preaching was so effective answered, "because my church prays for me." Is my preaching to be effective to reveal the mystery of Christ which bears fruit and multiplies? Then you must pray.

What is the cost of declaring this mystery? For Paul it was imprisonment. Why would declaring the gospel lead towards imprisonment. Why ought we to have an expectation of coming up against the authorities and powers of the world? Because we are declaring a king! This is not rocket science. We live in a world in which everyone thinks they are their own kings, their own creators, their own Gods. And our message is Christ. It is offensive in that he is the king and there is no other. It is good news because he is good. Look at your king, hanging on the cross for you his enemy. He is good.

So pray for open doors. Opportunities for gospel proclamation. And pray specifically.

Colossians 4:4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Make it clear is a little sterile. The word has to do with the mystery of Christ which Paul mentioned above. It is a way of saying that this must be properly revealed. Paul asks that he might, as broken as he is, be able to communicate the truths of the gospel in a way in which they might be truly shown, heard, understood, and grasped.

Pray these things for your church, me a preacher, and one another in the church.

2. Action

Colossians 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

Just as Paul had explained throughout his instruction to the household and before we are to do all things in the name of Jesus Christ. That means the representation of Christ in the world to most people will be his church. Paul is deeply conscious of this reality that they may never read the sacred texts but they will read you. Your life and character. This requires wisdom. And timeliness. The phrase to make the best use of the time, is literally like you should buy up what you can like you found a bargain. Don't neglect the opportunities that you receive, and try and use the relationships that you have to proclaim Christ.

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Now what to say is as important as how to say it. The person who plows forward with the same way of communicating to everyone courageously just saying what needs to be said is the same as the person who cowardly hides and never makes the move to mention Christ. Because in both instances it is just about them. Our disposition is to be gracious, salty, and to know how we ought to answer each person.

The gospel advances at the level of each person. You must be creative and considerate. You must ask questions, receive questions and seek to speak in a way in which you could be understood and even winsomely understood. It matters how you say the truths of the gospel they must reflect the heart of Christ who desires his people to be gathered in from all peoples in the world. You must proclaim Christ in a way which brings others in.

Pray and watch for these opportunities.

Join Paul in the mission of his life. Discipline these into your life. Prayer, and the seizing of opportunities.