

Final Words

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the book of Colossians and chapter 4...

It's our last week in this book, and I hope that God has used it to challenge and convict us all in our understanding of who Jesus is and how the gospel ought to relate to our lives.

Hopefully, months from now, if someone asked you – what is the theme of the book of Colossians? You'd be able to say something about how Jesus is Supreme over all things and sufficient for all that we need.

Paul has spoken about the glories of Christ and the gospel and applied it to our lives and our relationships in the church. Now in these last verses, Paul is going to give some final instructions, particularly about how we act with those outside the church before offering some final greetings.

Read **Colossians 4:2-18**

Intro

I want to begin today by asking you a question – what do you call this thing?



(show picture)

Is it a see-saw? A teeter-totter?

I remember playing on seesaws or teeter-totters as a kid on the school playground. It's hard to find them today, probably because they can be pretty dangerous. Some kids

played on them by gently going up and down for a while until you got bored of it. But for me, there were basically two ways that my friends and I played on them – one was to try to bounce your seat down on the ground as hard as you could in order to make the kid on the other end fly up off of their seat. I don't recommend that way.

The other way was to try to balance on them. We would try to stand in the middle and see how many kids we could get on both sides while keeping it level. You wanted the weight to be evenly distributed to stay balanced, without one side going down too far which would make the other side go up.

It's kind of remarkable how many things there are in life that we need to balance – holding two or more ideas in tension, not too many of one and/or too little of something else.

One of those things that needs careful balance is the ministry of a local church. Churches need to be aimed at making disciples – that is very clear from the words of Jesus in the Great Commission, “Go into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that he has commanded...”

That means that we need to be reaching out and sharing the good news of Jesus with others and when people believe, we should baptize them into the church. But it also means that we need to be helping people *obey* all that Jesus commanded. We as a church should seek to help our own members grow as followers of Jesus. Jesus tells us to baptize new believers *and* teach people to obey all that He commanded.

So those two things need to be in balance with each other. We should not only focus on outreach nor only focus on teaching within the church. And when we open our Bibles to the letters written by the Spirit of God to local churches, we find exactly that. Churches should know God. They need to know doctrine and what God has revealed about Himself and His Son Jesus. And they need to know how to live in light of those truths. But they also need to know how to relate to those outside the church. How should we interact with those who are not in the church?

The book of Colossians follows this outline exactly. Paul begins by teaching doctrine about who Jesus is as the Supreme one over all things. And then he talks about what Jesus did in reconciling sinners to God through His Cross. And as we've seen in chapter three, Paul then applies these things to our Christians lives as individuals and as members of this new church community.

Finally, now in chapter 4, Paul is going to give some directions about relating to those outside the church. He's going to give some closing remarks, as it were, and they involve applying some of the things that he's been teaching about throughout this letter.

I see here three general commands – pray, walk, and greet.

Pray

The first command is found there in verse 2...

Colossians 4:2

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Notice he says to 'continue' in prayer, implying that what? You're already praying. Prayer should be a normal, expected part of the life of a Christian. It should be something that we all do. If prayer is not part of your life, then you need to ask why not? Why do you not talk to God?

Or maybe prayers is just a small part of your life – why is that? I know that all of us could easily feel guilty about not praying as we should, but our lack of prayer should prick our consciences. We should desire to spend time praying. And we should keep on praying *steadfastly* – being devoted to it, planning on it. Making it a regular part of your routines.

Make a habit out of it – that only takes like 28 or 40 or 90 or something days, right Alex? I don't remember. We should make it a habit like eating dessert, that's my takeaway...

Being watchful

Notice the way that Paul specifically directs us to pray – we are to be watchful in it.

The idea here is that we are to be awake in our prayers. We are to be alert and attentive to what's really happening in the world. We are not to be asleep or indifferent in our prayers. We are not to be apathetic or bored in our prayers.

This is an appropriate instruction for us when it comes to prayer, isn't it? Many times our prayers can become repetitive or rote or mindless. There have been many nights when I have fallen asleep while praying.

And so here Paul tells us that we are to be watchful in our prayers. The word for watchful here is often used in the New Testament in reference to the second coming of Jesus. We are to be watchful because the Master of the house may return at any moment.

Growing up, our house was down a long gravel lane. And my mother would sometimes leave lists of chores for my brothers and I to do before she returned. But being the boys that we were, we didn't always get right on doing those chores. Well, many times that meant that we'd hear her car driving up the gravel lane and we'd jump up and rush around the house, spraying dusting spray in the air, and trying to get some vacuum marks down on the carpet before she walked in the door. We weren't ready for her to return, because we had played around like our Mom wasn't coming back, and we didn't have a care in the world.

That's the opposite of what Paul means here. We are to be watchful, expecting Jesus to return at any time, and so we are to use our time well. I think that's part of what Paul means in verse five when he says we are to make the best use of the time. The days are evil in that time is fleeting, it's temporary, do the important things. The end will be here before you know it. And we should pray with a kind of urgency because of that.

With thanksgiving

We are also to pray with thanksgiving. What a great week for this reminder, eh? Thankfulness or gratitude has been a regular theme in this book. We've seen the idea of giving thanks seven times in this short letter.

Part of our prayers being watchful is that we are awake to what God has done and is doing in our lives. And when that's true, the natural response is gratitude. When we consider what Jesus did for us in forgiving our sins and blessing us with eternal life and all the promises of an inheritance with Him in eternity, we should feel gratitude in our hearts.

But it's good for us to not just feel thankful – it's good for us to express that gratitude. Remember the story in the gospel in which Jesus healed ten lepers but only one came back and expressed that gratitude to Jesus? God delights for us to give expression to the gratitude in our hearts when we voice them to God by giving thanks in prayer.

Let this be a reminder to us today that we should be people who express our gratitude in our practice of prayer. Thankfulness should be a regular part of our prayer life, and not just at Thanksgiving.

So these are general instructions for how we are to pray, but Paul doesn't stop there. What does he ask them to pray for specifically? Look at verse 3...

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,

Paul says, pray for us. He has been giving all of these instructions and teachings to them, and now Paul wants them to do something for him – he wants them to pray for him and his companions. I need your prayers, Paul says.

We are never above needing prayer, are we?

Remember Paul's circumstances here when he writes this letter. Paul says in the last verse of this book, "Remember my chains". He's writing while imprisoned for preaching the gospel. When walked through the book of Acts, we read about those who opposed Paul and his trials before various governing officials. And Paul was wrongfully accused and spent years in different Roman prisons or under house arrest. He wants the Colossians to remember his imprisonment for the gospel.

But he doesn't ask for prayer in the same way that I might, does he? He doesn't say, "Pray that I am released from this injustice," or that his circumstances would change and become easier. It's not that those things would be wrong to pray for, but that's not what's most important to Paul.

But here he says, pray for this – that God would open to us a door for the word. Ask God to open a door, meaning ask that God would give an opportunity, a foothold, a way to speak the gospel. He's concerned about reaching out, evangelism.

He is asking for prayers so that the mission might continue. Be watchful in your prayers – pray that we would be clear and faithful to share the gospel with those who do not believe.

In the same way, we should pray for open doors in our own efforts to reach out. Have you prayed for an open door with that family member who has not trusted in Christ? Have you prayed about an open door with your co-workers? With your kids? With the people you meet out in public?

We should be praying for open doors at Edgelea School and with our immediate community. We should pray that we have an open door in our own neighbors. Maybe you should pray this week for an open door for the gospel and see what God does.

Paul asks that the door would be open for the word which is another way to describe the gospel. Here he calls it the mystery of Christ. The picture is actually that the gospel message would go through the open door. The gospel does the work as it is clearly declared. That's why he says in verse 4,

Colossians 4:4

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

Paul says, you pray for me to have an open door for the gospel, that I would make it clear. My job – make the gospel clear. The Word does the work.

So we see here this divine dance between God's sovereign work and man's responsibility to obey. God must open the door, and the gospel does the work in the hearts of those who hear. Our responsibility is to declare it clearly. God works through our obedience to get the good news to those who have not heard. The Father elects from eternity past, the Son accomplishes the work needed to redeem us, and the Spirit opens hearts and applies the gospel. Our task is to clearly speak this gospel message to a lost world.

How do we make the word clear?

It means that we don't try to trick people. We don't use bait-and-switch techniques for evangelism or try to manipulate responses.

Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:2**

But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

We want to declare the gospel openly so that each person may decide for themselves. Our job is to be clear. Don't shy away from offending people in the right way – let the reality of sin and the need for repentance and forgiveness be clear. Put off the "I want people to like me..." thoughts and the "I need to be right..." thoughts.

The gospel is foolishness to those who do not believe; but our job is not to change the message. Our goal is to be honest and clear about who we are and what God has done.

That's my aim in preaching – clarity. I try to be as clear as I can; sometimes I'm more successful than other times. But that's the goal – clear open statement of the truth.

Christians should speak with boldness and directness about the gospel message. That means that we need to know it backwards and forwards. Do you know what the gospel is? Would you be able to tell someone else how to become a Christian? I love the opportunities I get when someone brings a friend to me to talk about how they can be forgiven of their sins and follow Jesus. But don't think you need a pastor to do that. You can share the gospel yourself!

So do you know it well enough to be clear about it? What are the key things you would say? We need to be able to clearly declare the gospel message. One way to do that is with the four words: **God, Man, Christ, Response.**

God created all things well, but through our sin, we have rebelled against Him and rightly deserve His judgement. But because of His great mercy, God sent Jesus to live and die and rise again from the grave so that we might be forgiven when we put our faith in Him. We want to be as clear as we can about that message.

So Paul says, I want you to keep praying, doing so with alertness and gratitude to God, and pray for me – that I would have an opportunity to clearly speak the gospel.

Walk

Not only should we speak the gospel clearly, we must also walk in wisdom. Look at verse **Colossians 4:5...**

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

What does it mean to walk in wisdom toward outsiders?

We should know how to put the truth into practice. It's been said before that knowledge is about facts, wisdom is about applying those facts. So knowledge is knowing that tomatoes are a fruit; wisdom is not putting tomatoes in a fruit salad.

So Paul says, live wisely in the world. Avoid foolish pursuits that are a waste of time. Don't live for the temporary, set your minds on things above. Use your time well, especially in relation to those outside the church.

Colossians 4:6

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

Paul continues on this theme of reaching out – you should walk in wisdom and your words should be gracious. You shouldn't speak without grace, meaning in a harsh or hateful way.

What does that look like?

Gracious speech is genuine and encouraging. It isn't always about me or complaints about the world. It's compassionate and shows an interest in others. The parallel passage in Ephesians says that our words should give grace to those who hear them. They build up others and are spoken at the appropriate time.

Our words should be seasoned with salt. What does that mean? Salty speech is gracious yes, but more than that, it's interesting. Salt gives flavor and preserves, so our speech should be compelling. Christians should value speaking with beauty and in an interesting way that invites attention.

Paul says we need to know how to answer each person. That means that our words should come after listening. To answer each one wisely, we must listen to our friends and neighbors. We need to have relationships with them, not just generic responses.

But we need to take care that we don't merely treat people like they're only useful to us if they do what we like. People aren't projects. Treating them in that way is the opposite of gracious.

Let me say this on the whole topic of the church's ministry to those in the world outside of the church. We need more Christians who are engaging in the public sphere in ways that are gracious and provocative and interesting. Christians who are clear on the gospel and who display wisdom. That could be more Christians engaging in public life or serving in government. It could mean showing hospitality with our time and our resources. It

could also mean using social media or entertainment to present the truth in a salty, compelling and gracious way.

We should walk in wisdom toward outsiders, using words that are gracious and clear and compelling because the time is short. So we pray, we walk, and finally we greet...

Greet

The final verses show Paul doing exactly what he prayed for the Colossian believers – that their hearts would be knit together in love. Here is Paul weaving together threads of different people's lives, making connections and encouraging various people.

To change the image a little bit, this is kind of like one of those family photos in which a bunch of people are trying to squeeze in. Paul mentions all these various people. It's like, "Oh yea, don't forget this guy!" and "This lady has been so helpful!"

So in verses 7-9 he mentions Tychicus and Onesimus who are faithful brothers who will encourage their hearts. We don't have time to go into it all this morning, but Onesimus shows up again in the book of Philemon, and his story is a fascinating example of the grace of God in relationships.

In verses 10-17, he mentions:

- Aristarchus who was imprisoned with Paul, which we read about at the end of the book of Acts.
- Mark, who had abandoned their group for some reason and was the center of a conflict between Paul and Barnabas – now Paul says to welcome him! What an example of forgiveness and grace, knitting their hearts together in love.
- Jesus who is called Justus, Luke, and Demas
- He sends greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha, who was apparently a wealthy enough woman to have a large house which she opened for the church to gather together in
- And then there's Archippus, who had been given a ministry and needed some encouragement to complete the task.

Look at verse 17, **Colossians 4:17**

And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

This verse can be puzzling because we don't know what that ministry was exactly. But I think most of us know what it is to start something and need that encouragement to finish the job.

Archippus received a ministry in the Lord – God had a job for him to do, and God expected Him to fulfill it. I wonder what ministry the Lord has given to you to fulfill? We are not all responsible to address every need around us, but God does have something that He wants you to do – some person that you need to share Christ with, some need He expects you to meet. Do you know what that is? See that you fulfill the ministry you have received in the Lord.

And there in the center of the photo is this guy Epaphras in verses 12 and 13...

Colossians 4:12-13

Epaphras, 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. **13** For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

As best as we can tell, Epaphras had heard the gospel from Paul while he was in Ephesus and then returned to his hometown of Colossae. He had shared this good news with others there and had helped to plant this new gathering of believers into a church. And now, Paul wants them to know that he sends his greetings and is praying for them – that they would be mature and assured in the will of God.

Isn't it encouraging to know that someone is praying for you? I know that it's one of the most helpful things that people can say to me, especially when I think you mean it. ☺

When we look at a list like this, we see that the Christian community is a rich tapestry woven together in love, even across different locations and even among people who have never met.

Brothers and sisters, we are united by Christ into a people from all over the world. All of us who are in Christ, those who were just baptized this morning and those who were baptized many years ago, we are in the same family of God. We should not live as islands unto ourselves, but knit our hearts together with all those who are in Christ.

When we read lists of names like this I think we should ask ourselves – who would be on our list? Who would we greet in the Lord? Are we connected to the body of Christ such that we know other people and we are known by other people? That’s a task that belongs to every one of us. It means talking to people and listening to them. It means getting involved.

I think there is a temptation to treat the church as something like the internet – it’s something to watch and observe, but not participate in yourself. Too many of us are just lurkers when it comes to church. We’re content to just sit back and see what everyone else is doing.

Friends, the church is not that. It’s not just a show to watch or a community club that offers programs for us or our kids. It’s a community which has been united by Christ where our hearts are to be knit together in love. It’s a community on a shared mission to make disciples of all nations. We are all called to participate in this – not just watch others do it.

Paul ends chapter four by writing with his own hand, “Remember my chains. Grace be with you.” He greeted them with grace at the beginning and he ends with grace here.

Conclusion

So that’s the book of Colossians. And as we conclude our study in the book of Colossians, we should remember again what Paul has so clearly taught us. Let us put a stake down deep in our souls regarding what God has shown us here.

Listen again to these words from chapter 1...

Colossians 1:27

27 To them [the saints or the church – talking about you...] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The mystery of the gospel is Christ in you. God’s mysterious plan which was hidden in prior ages but has now been revealed is that Christ will not just forgive you and nail your sins to the Cross, but that He will now live in you by His Spirit, giving you the power to defeat sin and walk in obedience to His commands. Jesus has given us all that we need!

Brothers and sisters, God has invited us to participate in the great mystery of the gospel, Christ in us. That's the good news of the gospel message at the heart of this book.

What is this gospel? It is the amazing, hard-to-believe news that the Creator of the universe, God Himself, the One who sustains all things by His power, the One before whom we will all stand one day to face judgement, the One for whom all things exist. That God has taken on human flesh. He became one of us in the person of Jesus.

And Jesus, in whom is all the fullness of God, laid down His life as the payment that our sins rightfully deserved. He took our judgment on Himself. And by doing that, he took the record of our sins that testified against us and nailed it to the Cross so that we would be forgiven when we put our faith in Him.

If you've never trusted in Christ, I want to urge you to do that. Don't put it off, don't presume that God owes you tomorrow. Trust in Him today.

And if you have trusted in this gospel, then your old self has been put to death, and you have been raised in Him and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

So let us walk in this new life, rooted in the gospel, continuing in prayer, and walking in wisdom toward outsiders. Let us pray for and seek open doors to declare to the world the great mystery of the gospel.

Let's pray...

Lord's Supper

We come now to the time in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper together. I'm going to invite our deacons to come and serve now if they would, and the band to come lead us in song.

This is one of the two ordinances of the church, the other being baptism. As an ordinance, it was established by our Lord Jesus while he was on earth, and it is to be regularly practiced by his church until his return.

Therefore, this table is intended for Christians. And so, if you're here this morning, and you do not know Christ personally and have not trusted in him for the forgiveness of your sins, then we would ask that you heed the warning in Scripture and refrain from partaking. Please don't be embarrassed by that, but I would urge you to consider your own need for forgiveness. Likewise, parents, you can use this as an opportunity to explain to your children what these things represent if they have not yet come to know Christ.

As a sign of Christian charity and the unity of the church, if you're a follower of Christ, we want to invite you to come and participate with us.

The Bible instructs us to examine ourselves, so let me encourage you to use this time to examine your heart and confess any known sin. Agree with God about your sin, and confess it to Him.

And then find encouragement in the complete forgiveness offered through Jesus' death and resurrection. By His body and blood shed for us, we believe that we will stand forgiven before God one day. Our sins will be wiped away, nailed to the Cross.

And now, the mystery has been revealed – Christ is in us by His Spirit. In partaking of these symbols, we show that we have been united with Him. And one day when He appears, we will also appear with Him in glory.

-Pray

-1 Cor 11