

Be Devoted

Colossians 4:2-6 by Mark Hammer

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INTRODUCTION

As we have read through Colossians, Paul has addressed the spiritual mysticism that has both poisoned and derailed the unity of believers, and he has encouraged the faithful to be alert of that situation and to come under the supremacy and Lordship of Jesus Christ who was before all things, who created all things, and by whom all things hold together. The believers are called to take their knowledge of the truth and understand it, so that in wisdom they will grow to look more like Christ to which there is no higher calling—walking in a way that clearly reveals the glory of Christ to the world! Living that type of life will unify the Church, revealing a mature body of Christ to the broken world, so that the world can be put back together to the glory of God.

In Colossians 3:17 Paul says, *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”* He then goes on to paint a picture of what living in the name of Jesus by word and deed look like as a husband and wife, as a child, as a slave, and as a slave master (3:18-4:1), and now he’ll use a broader brush stroke for all the faithful when he says:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Col. 4:2-6)

DEVOTED

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). Devotion is lacking in our society nowadays. In collegiate sports, players are no longer devoted to their teams for the long haul; if they receive a better “NIL” deal (Name, Image, Likeness) from another school, even if it’s the rival school, they’ll leave. In business, leaders will abandon their foundational vision and mission statements that made them successful in the first place, just so they can make a few extra bucks. In relationships, some married couples are no longer devoted to one another, because they reduce their spouse down to an object of happiness on their own terms and by their own

definitions, and so they'll walk out when times are tough and feelings of worldly happiness fail them. Even Christians struggle with devotion to their churches; there is no sense of pride in their family of believers, which was always displayed by an investment of service to one another; they might be devoted to attendance, but even then the moment the Church service doesn't appeal to their subjective truths of what *they* believe a *real* Church service should look like, they will leave, and a year or so later, they will leave the next family of believers, too. Anymore, devotion is uncommon in our culture.

Furthermore, in our fast-paced society, there are a lot of folks who do not want to work too hard; they want things fast, and they're always looking for something better, and so their commitments are shallow and they wind up crying on Tiktok, complaining about twenty-five hour work weeks at Starbucks demanding a union to be formed! However, the person of wisdom knows that the greatest benefits come through hard work, slow and steady faithfulness—a wise understanding that contentment with godliness is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6). All that to say, devotion (προσκαρτερέω proskartereō) is important! **The life of the Christian is a devoted life, one of constant diligence and attention!**

Look at the main characteristics of the early church. Acts 2:42 tell us that, “*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” The church in its infancy didn't grow through incredible music, celebrity pastors with motivational speeches, or amazing coffee bars, but it grew through the faithful being devoted to unifying disciplines—scriptural teaching, eating together, and praying! All those elements anchored individuals to come together and become a people that make up the fullness of Christ which in turn changes the world. For this very reason, Paul says here, “*Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.*” Paul already began his letter by revealing the very practice to which he now calls these believers to—“*Give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying ALWAYS for you*” (Col. 1:3). In Colossians 1:9 he writes, “*For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we HAVE NOT CEASED TO PRAY for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*” Almost every letter of Paul's, minus Galatians because he was pretty ticked with the recipients, he opens with thanksgiving and the expression of his continual prayers for those he's writing to (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-16; 6:18; Phil. 1:3-4; 1 Thess. 1:2; 5:17-18; 1 Tim. 2:1).

DEVOTED TO PRAYER

Paul clearly is concerned with helping Christians to know how to pray. First, he says to be devoted to prayer (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:12; 1 Pet. 4:12; 1 Tim. 5:5; cf. Lk 11:5-8). He gives the example of this when later he says, “*Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God*” (4:12). Prayer is *not* an extension of the Christian life, but it is to be common practice for the Christian each and everyday, and to labor in it earnestly. **Each day is so busy, that our day demands us to busy our lives with prayer.**

One of my Bible college professors always encouraged my class to make it a discipline to talk to the Lord briefly, every time we walked into a new environment as a way to take on an ongoing attitude of prayer. To this day, when I get out of my bed, I pray. When I get in the shower, I pray. When I get into my car, I pray. When I get into my office, I pray. When I walk with my kids, I pray! My day easily becomes infiltrated by hundreds of small but powerful prayers, which inevitably leads to a closer walk with God, having him on my mind constantly, because in any strong and meaningful relationship ongoing conversation is a necessity.

Second, we are also called to be quick in having an attitude of thanksgiving in our prayers (Eph. 5:20). **When we slow down enough and think of all that the Lord has given us, the graces of our lives are far more abundant than the garbage we tend to focus on.** Many times my prayers throughout the day are prayers of thanks. “Thank you for my wife.” “Thank you for this beautiful sunset.” “Thank you for your provisions.” “Thank you for loving me.” **Prayers of thanksgiving have a way of shaping a positive attitude for which it becomes fuel for glorifying Christ in any and all situations of life!** Prayers of thanksgiving have a way of anchoring us to Christ’s peace, because we recognize that God truly is with us providing our most greatest needs! Therefore we are to “*be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” (Phil. 4:6-7).

PRAYING THE BEST PRAYERS

Paul moves from focusing on the attitude of prayer towards a prayer request for himself when he says, “[pray] at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3-4). That “open door” was the door to evangelism—sharing the gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Acts 14:27). Paul so badly wanted the opportunity to share the good news with people, even *after* recognizing that was the very reason that landed him in prison in the first place.

I experience a strong conviction when I read about the prayers of the early church and humbly recognize that those prayers are often vastly different from the prayers that I pray. Many times my own prayers tend to revolve around getting to “peace-land,” a place where I feel I am in control. I mean doesn’t God want smooth sailing for my life? Isn’t he glorified when I proclaim that everything is as it should be, as I believe it should be? Oftentimes, the prayers I hear and the requests I see of other saints, are similar to my own. We want the Lord to remove us from hardship and difficulty—*heal this pain, heal this hurt, restore that relationship, give me safe passage, give me a big tax return...please give me a big tax return.* These prayers are in no way bad prayers, but I also do not believe them to be the *best* prayers, or even the prayers we see recorded in the New Testament.

More often than not the motivation behind our prayers has little to do with kingdom advancement and more to do with self-preservation. They are not the consistent prayers we find as a pattern in the New Testament—prayers that are consistent with either remaining faithful during hardship or praying prayers that could make life more difficult *because* of righteousness sake. Here is Paul imprisoned in Rome, and one would think he would take the opportunity to call for a prayer vigil concerning his imprisonment—“Pray that I am freed of these chains, and that the prison door flings open!” Instead, he asks that they pray that God would open up a door for the word to be planted, so that the mystery of God can be clearly known, understanding that’s what got him chained in the first place! (Side note: maybe these prayers are what led to the gospel going forth to the whole praetorian guard (Phil 1:13)). The real question is **do we pray prayers that could actually make life more challenging?** Do we pray the prayers of the first century church—prayers of boldness, courage, wisdom, endurance, peace, abounding love, opportunities, strength, clarity, discernment, fellowship, unity, or encouragement?

If there's anything we could learn from this portion of text, it's this: **what you pray for is just as important as how you pray**. Pray with a kingdom mindset! Paul specifically asks that the church would pray for an opportunity, not to open up a door of release, but to open a door to share the good news. "God open my eyes to not miss an opportunity to plant or water a seed. Lord give me the boldness and courage to not turn from the open door but to run through it with excitement and passion for your namesake!" In addition, Paul asks for prayers to communicate the good news in such a way that it is plainly and effectively spoken. "Lord, when I take hold of the opportunity, give me the right words to express your wonderful message of life!" He understands that **the power is in the gospel message of salvation more than in the messenger** (Romans 1:16). In no way is Paul ignoring the impact of the life of the messenger, but he's putting the power of the gospel punch in proper order.

LIVE WISELY

Now Paul turns from prayer to living wisely. "*Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person*" (Col. 4:5-6). **Although, the power is in the message of the gospel, Paul doesn't discount that the messengers and those representing the message can have a positive or negative influence on how that message takes root!** Honestly, how attractive and impactful is the gospel message from a messenger who does not seem to live out the message he speaks of? About as attractive as a parent who attempts to persuade his child that eating brussel sprouts are delicious and good for their health, while revealing their own disgust for the veggies as their face shows the torment in swallowing them down. Good luck with that.

The word "conduct" (περιπατέω peripatéō) in verse five literally means the manner in which one walks, lives, or orders their life. This piece ties in with the rest of the letter, as Paul has constantly made the case that wise living is walking in Christ, being clothed in Christ—putting off the old and putting on the new (3:5-10)! In a similar way Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: *Only conduct yourselves in a manner* (πολιτεύομαι politeúomai –behave as a citizen) *worthy of the gospel of Christ* (Phil. 1:27a) In actuality, the word used here in the letter to the Philippians means to behave as a citizen, specifically a citizen of heaven:

...so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” (Philippians 1:27-30)

What does a citizen of Christ’s Kingdom look like? Colossians 4:5 seems clear that it’s wise living towards outsiders. The question becomes what does wise looking look like? Walking in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Behaving as people of the truth—the day—the light! (Rom. 13:13). Walking by faith, and not sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Not living a life of flesh, such as those outside of Christ, who chase after everything the fleshly nature desires; they are of the kingdom of darkness, but we live by the spirit, chasing after things that are of the spirit of God, because we’re of a kingdom of light (Eph. 4:17). *“But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love...” (Ephesians 4:1-2).*

Now, why would Paul follow up his prayer request, about having a door of opportunity open for the gospel to be spoken effectively, with an encouragement for the faithful to live wisely, as this wisdom language has been a thread throughout the entire letter (1:9, 28; 2:3; 3:16)? Maybe it’s because one impacts and affects the other. **Too often, we live our faith in a silo only thinking about our own personal christlikeness, but we forget that how we live our faith out, impacts both the faith of the insiders and outsiders.** The evidence of your faith, impacts the faithful here at church, and how you live your life in Christ can either open doors of opportunities wider for the gospel to take root or close the doors. We do not know how our example of faithfulness, or lack thereof, might be encouraging or discouraging a non-believer that is faithfully be witnessed to and disciplined by someone else unbeknownst to us. Live your faith out wisely, in such a way that either seeds are being planted or seeds you don’t even know are planted are being watered. Christians are to live wisely in the world. **By how we live our lives, we reveal our understanding of the truth which has set us free.**

DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME

Therefore, make the most of every opportunity God gives you for the gospel seed to be planted or possibly watered. “Making the Most” (ἐξαγοράζω *exagorázō*) is redemptive language, by making wise and sacred use of every opportunity you’re given, so that zeal and well doing are as it were the purchase money by which we make the time our own.” This is about the precious commodity of time—don’t waste it. **Time is precious because every Christian lives in a critical point in history, where the eternal destiny of souls hangs in the balance.** Time is also precious because once it’s lost, it can never be regained. Ephesians 5:15-16 reads, *“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”*

I heard about a man in his late eighties who came to Christ, and at the altar of conviction he sobbed big tears and kept repeating the words, “I’ve wasted it. I wasted it.” He had spent the last few years of his life, roaming the beach side collecting sea shells, and it’s all that he would have to leave as a legacy. Christians, time is too valuable to just stock up on seashells, invest in our golf game, or just collect a lot of toys. Dads, we can encourage our kids in sports, but if their knowledge of basketball is more than their knowledge of the Bible, we’re just collecting seashells. Husbands, we can give our wives everything to make her feel externally beautiful, but if our investment to her external happiness outweighs our investment to her internal holiness, we’re collecting sea shells. If all we do is fill our time with the things that build our kingdom and not God’s, we’re just collecting seashells—wasting our time, not making the most of it! It’s not too late for Christ to redeem your time moving forward! **Don’t waste your time, make the most of it!**

TIME TO GRACIOUSLY TALK

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other” (Col. 3:12-13a)—all that to say, be *gracious!* And because we are called to be gracious, *“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person”* (Colossians 4:6). Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words.” However Paul tells us that *“faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). In Paul’s request for a door to be open, it’s specifically *so*

that the word can be spoken (4:3). I get what Francis is saying but I fear most Christians take that quote as an escape from the responsibility to share with our mouths—“Oh, my good deeds will be enough to promote the gospel.” No it won’t! If this is the case, Christ wasn’t the best example, as He often taught and spoke truth. Paul and the apostles also encourage believers to speak truth.

One of the greatest ways that we redeem the opportunities given to us is to be wise in what we talk about and share with others. What does wisdom of speech sound like? First, our speech needs to be motivated by charity. Our presentation and motivation must be to aid in setting the captives free—that in humility we would empathize with those captive by the common ignorance we too once shared, before hearing the sweet words of salvation. *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear”* (Ephesians 4:29). When we talk, may our motivation be that the listener might be freed from the perils of sin and darkness and find the riches of his grace! Second, as salt both purifies and preserves, our conversations should revolve around truths that both preserve and purify the listener as a grace to them. It’s very easy to talk about surface level things because they’re comfortable, but we’re not making the most of the opportunity when we understand it’s appropriate to share truth and we neglect it. How many times do we have the opportunity to start up meaningful conversations with people with intentionality and purpose, but instead we’re like, “Hey guys! Oh, Big gulps, huh? Alright, welp, see you later!” and just walk away wasting the option that was before us? As faithful followers of Christ, we must make the most of the time given us by living wisely and speaking charitably, so that more doors of opportunities open for the gospel to go forth, for seeds to be planted and possibly watered! **Time is short, don’t waste this moment but make the most of it!**