

THREE FINAL EXHORTATIONS

Colossians 4:2-6

Intro: Today we come to the three final exhortations which Paul gave to the believers in Colosse. I have been amazed that not more of the commentators have at least suggested a reason which these exhortations appear here instead of earlier in the epistle. It might appear that the Apostle Paul had neglected to mention these earlier, and so he tacked them on here at the end because they were too important to omit. But we can't believe that the Spirit of God would have guided Paul in that way. If Paul had been writing "on his own," he might have put them here because he wanted to include them, and not having a computer he could not *cut* and *pasted* them earlier in the epistle.

When we compare the way Paul concluded the Ephesian letter with the way that he concluded this letter, we see that in Ephesians, after addressing wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, and masters, he gave that very important passage regarding the spiritual warfare we are all involved in. And then in that connection he mentioned prayer, as he did here in Colossians, including a request for himself and his ministry. And then in four verses he was finished.

How are we going to explain these exhortations here in Col. 4:2-6? There are three. The first has to do with prayer (in verses 2 through 4), the second has to do with their *walk* (in verse 5). The last one has to do with their *talk* (in verse 6).

I think that they can be explained in two ways:

1) As Adam Clarke in his commentary so well, especially about Paul's mention of prayer:

This was the apostle's general advice to all; without this, neither wives, husbands, children, parents, servants, nor masters, could fulfil the duties which God, in their respective stations, required of them (Vol. VI, p. 531).

So Paul meant that they were to pray for themselves first of all –wives, husbands, children, parents, servants, and masters. But it also would include praying for each other, or praying for others in all of these categories that they might know. And I don't need to tell any of you but I am going to say it anyway: *Prayer means that we talk to God. We talk to God about ourselves. After that we can pray for others. But we need to recognize our own needs before we begin to concentrate on the needs of*

others, even others in our own families. How many troubles could be avoided if we would only pray.

But I think there is a second reason for these exhortations as Paul was bringing his epistle to a close. From the nature of these commands it appears that Paul was seeking to leave the Colossians with these reminders that they needed to be thinking about getting the Gospel to others. It was not unusual in those days for some members of a family to be saved, but others not. Or maybe only one member of a family would be saved. In such cases it was especially important for the one who was saved, or for all who were saved, to be seeking to please God. That is one of the greatest ways of reaching others with the Gospel. Paul was not hesitant about asking the Colossian church to pray for him. See verses 3 and 4. But surely in verses 5 and 6 Paul had in mind their witness to people who were “without,” that is, *without Christ, or on the outside of the fold of salvation.*

In the early part of the epistle, as I have been pointing out, Paul was concerned that the people in Colosse would know the truth, the truth of God. Then he wanted them to live out their faith in lives of obedience to the Lord. Then he concentrated as we have just seen on individuals in the home, and in the workplace (so to speak). And in closing his epistle he was pointing them to world in need of Christ. Our world would not be in the mess it is in today if people only knew the Lord! But it is so easy for us to get comfortable with each other and the fellowship we have with the Lord, that we are inclined to forget that one of the main reasons the Lord leaves us here, is that we might bear testimony to others of our faith in Christ so that they might be saved.

Now with these things in mind let us examine verses 2 through 6 of Colossians 4 to see what the Apostle Paul had to say in his concluding exhortations. As I have already said, his exhortations had to do with three things: prayer, their walk, and their talk. So let's begin by examining what Paul had to say here about prayer.

I. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO PRAY (Col. 4:2-4).

(Read verses 2, 3, and 4.)

“Continue in prayer.” This means not only that they were to pray, but that they were to be diligent in prayer. They were to persevere in prayer.

They were not to let anything, *anything*, keep them from their own, personal times with the Lord. Years ago Lucille and I had John and Isobel Kuhn in our home for dinner, and when it got close to nine o'clock they indicated that they needed to leave, and it was so they could get to bed in time to get up early the next morning to spend their time individually with the Lord! That is what Paul was talking about here. He meant that as much as we enjoy fellowship with each other, we must not let our fellowship with each other make it difficult for us to keep our appointment with the Lord.

But maybe I should back up a step or two here. Paul told the Colossians to "continue in prayer." He was assuming that they were already faithfully praying. Can we assume that about each other here today? Do we have a special time and place each day where we meet with the Lord? Have you met with the Lord today before you came to church? I'm not asking you to tell me, but I am asking you to answer that question for yourself. You can't continue in prayer (as Paul meant it) unless you are praying. It is good for us to pray as families. It is good for us to pray when we come to church. But nothing is more important than that all of us who know the Lord are meeting with Him daily for prayer. Prayer is talking to God, but it is always more profitable if we spend some time first letting Him speak to us through His Word. "The Word of God and Prayer" ought to be the words which describe the way we begin each day, and the way we live each day.

So if you are not meeting with the Lord each day, begin today, and then don't let anything ever cause you to stop, even for a short time.

But let us go on. Concerning prayer Paul not only told them to continue faithfully, diligently, and fervently, but he told them to "watch in the same," that is, in prayer, "with thanksgiving." This word "watch" emphasizes what I have been saying about diligence in prayer. But it also carries with it the idea of staying awake to what is going on first in your own life, but then also in the lives of others. When the people first heard that the Apostle Paul was in prison in Rome, it should have brought them to their knees in prayer. If you hear of a husband and wife who are having trouble, that is an immediate call, not to gossip, but to pray. If parents are dealing with a rebellious child, we need to pray. We are not to be busybodies in each other's lives. That usually leads to gossip. But we are to stay awake to what is going on in our own families, or in the lives of people we know, and then pray. If we know of a need, we need to be

careful about telling others *even as a prayer request*. We need to take it to the Lord “with thanksgiving” – thanksgiving that this is what God wants us to do, and thanksgiving also when we see evidences that He is hearing and answering our prayers.

There is so much to pray about that all of us could spend day after day doing nothing but pray. We are to live in an attitude of prayer, recognizing our own need of the Lord’s blessing, and how much others need His blessing too. And don’t wait for a crisis before you pray. We can be sure that there are always needs in people’s lives just as there are always needs in our own lives.

But speaking of prayer, notice that Paul expresses a personal request to them. It was not that he would get out of jail. Nor was it an appeal for money. He asked that they would pray that “God would open” for them, his and his fellowprisoners, “a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ.” What is “the mystery of Christ”? It is the Gospel. Paul believed that God opens doors, and also that He closes doors, or else leaves them shut. Paul was looking for open doors.

Paul saw an open door when he was on Mars’ Hill in Athens and saw that idol to an unknown God. So he began to tell them about the God whom they didn’t know! You probably remember also that when Paul and Silas were in Philippi, a business woman from Thyatira was there “whose heart the Lord opened,” and she was saved. When Paul wrote his first epistle to the church at Corinth, he told them that he expected to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, and then he explained why:

9 For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9).

But the open door was not all that he was concerned about. He also asked that they pray that when he had an open door for the Gospel, he would “make it manifest, as I (he) ought to speak.” In Acts 14:1 when Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium, “that they went both together into a synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. It must have been a wonderful experience to hear the Lord Jesus teach because the people often flocked to hear him. It is said in Acts 6:10 that when Stephen spoke, there were certain Jews in the synagogue Jerusalem who argued with him, but it is also said that “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.” Paul often saw this kind of blessing as he preached the Word, and he was

asking the church at Colosse that he would see the same kind of blessing as he spoke, for example, to any Roman soldier to whom he was chained, and to whom he would give the Gospel message. We know from Paul's epistles that he was a man who gave much time to prayer. But he still wanted others to be praying for him because he knew that God hears the prayers of His people, and often pours out blessing.

There is so much to say about prayer that I hesitate to move on, but move on I must.

The second parting request had to do with:

II. PAUL'S EXHORTATION CONCERNING THEIR WALK (Col. 4:5).

When Paul spoke of their walk, he was speaking about how they lived. This is the third time that he has used this word in Colossians. The first is in Col. 1:10. The second is in Col. 2:6. And here we have the third time in Col. 4:5.

Here he told them to "walk in wisdom." Actually his use of the word "walk" in chapter 1 helps us to understand what it means to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without." (Read Col. 1:9 and 10.) To walk in wisdom is to walk according to the will of God, and the only place we can find the will of God is in the Word of God. So to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without, *i.e., without Christ*, is not to walk according to their wisdom, but to walk according to God's wisdom revealed in His Word. There are some Christians, and some churches, today who believe that if we are to reach people without Christ, that we must approach them in terms of what they like – their sinful habits, their worldly ideas, their music, their pleasures. But that is not what Paul was saying. The most powerful testimony we can have with the world, is that of a godly life. I am not talking about a life in which we try to show people how good we are, but a life in which we humbly and graciously seek to live to please God. We don't win people to Christ by trying to please them, but by living to please the Lord. And it is significant that Paul mentioned their walk before he mentioned their *talk* as he did in the next verse.

"Redeeming the time." Thayer defines this phrase as "to make a wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well-doing are as it were the purchase-money by which we make the time

our own” (p. 220). One thing all of us are guilty of wasting is *time*. And it is particularly sad when time which could be used in talking to people about Christ is wasted by talking about things that really are not important at all. When we “redeem” the time we are intent on living in such a way that when the opportunity presents itself, or better, when the Lord puts before us a person who needs Christ, by our own careful walk we purchase the time to use it to serve the Lord rather than seeing it wasted for no good at all. *Time lost can never be regained*. That is the reason we need to be so careful about how we use it.

If we could only realize how powerful a godly life can be in our attempt to win others to the Savior, we would spend more time seeking to be what the Lord wants us to be that our lives might be useful under the Lord’s blessing, in turning others from darkness to light.

But I have one more verse before I close: Col. 4:6.

III. PAUL’S EXHORTATION REGARDING OUR SPEECH (Col. 4:6).

Paul was still thinking about our ministry to the world. (Read verse 6.)

Paul indicated in this verse if our speech is always with grace, seasoned with salt, that then we will know we “ought” (our friend δεῖ, meaning “must”) “to answer every man.”

What does it mean to have our speech “always with grace”? I don’t know of any better way to understand this than to study in the Gospels the way the Lord spoke to people, even when He knew that they were trying to get Him to say something that would incriminate Him.

But there is also a passage in Paul’s second letter to Timothy which shows us what it means to speak with grace. I am referring to 2 Tim. 2: 24-26:

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Look at the words, “not strive ... gentle ... patient ... meekness ...” Those are words of grace. We are not to argue, but to be gentle, patient, meek – just like the Lord Jesus was. We must never forget when we are speaking to anyone about his or her soul, that we are representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. The impression that they have of us, will probably be the impression that they will take with them of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what does this verse mean, “seasoned with salt.” Now we are talking about one use of salt, not its ability to preserve, but its ability to increase the tastiness of what we eat. So we are seeking to make the Gospel so attractive that they will want to feast their souls on Christ, eating His flesh, and drinking His blood.

There is a verse in the OT which speaks of salt in connection with the OT sacrifices. It is found in Lev. 2:13, and this is what it tells us:

13 And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.

“The salt of the covenant of thy God” is *the salt of the Word of God*. It was Jeremiah who gave us that wonderful statement about the Word of God. Listen to what he said:

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts (Jer. 15:16).

Now it is possible to be gentle, patient, and meek, and to refuse to be argumentative, but that is not enough. I purposely passed over one phrase in 2 Tim. 2:14 a moment ago, and it is the phrase, “apt to teach,” or able to teach. To teach what? To teach the Word. And what is it that is like shaking salt on what we have to say? It is when we give people the Word. It is the Word which is living and powerful and sharper than any twoedged sword, according to Heb. 4:12. Be gentle and patient and meek, to be sure, *but don't forget to give them the Word. People are born again by the Word of God which lives and abides forever, according to 1 Pet. 1:23.*

Concl: We love the Lord, don't we? And we love His Word. We love to read it, to study it, and to hear it taught. But as you and I enjoy Him and His Word and our fellowship together with Him, knowing that we have a home in heaven, there are millions of people in this world who

know nothing about the Word of God, nothing about the grace of God, nothing about the Son of God. And they are frantically seeking to be happy here on earth where there are only pleasures for a season. How our hearts should long to see more of them turn to Christ, to experience in Him the forgiveness of their sins and to receive the wonderful gift of eternal life.

Do you and I want to see people coming to Christ? God must draw them to Himself, but He has commissioned us to carry the message to them. Let us do it, not in our way, but in His way. That is how people will be reached, and then we will know when they do come, that God is the One Who deserves all of the glory.

May the message of our text for today do in our hearts what Paul obviously prayed that the truth would do in the hearts of those Colossian Christians so long ago, making them carry the message of the Gospel to those citizens of Colosse who needed to become citizens of heaven. Remember the importance of prayer, then our walk, and finally the Word of God given to people in the gentleness and patience and meekness of Christ in us.