

*Colossians 4:2-6***PREFACE**

The apostle Paul has just a few more things to say by way of counsel before he begins his typical housekeeping remarks with which he closes most of his letters. He returns to the subject of prayer, and the Colossians' conduct toward those outside the church.

**v2-4**

In the writing craft there is something called the "circle method," where the writer completes a narrative arc by returning to an earlier theme. Paul employed this in his letter to the Colossians. As he prepared to wrap up this letter, I believe Paul went back and reread what he had written earlier—or had his amanuensis read it back to him—for in the conclusion of his letter he touches on themes with which he began the message. Or, perhaps, these themes were so deeply inculcated in him that they simply rose back to the surface of his thoughts.

**Read Colossians 1:3, 9.**

Paul opens this letter expressing his thanks to God for the Colossian's level of faith, as it has been reported to him. And he makes it clear that he and those with him have been steadily praying for them, and giving thanks for them. Their situation is always before him; they remain a permanent item on his prayer list.

Then, in the closing paragraphs of this missive, Paul returns to the subject of prayer—this time turning it around to exhort the Colossians to a devotion to prayer, and to ask them to pray for him.

**Read Colossians 4:2-4.****v2**

Paul colors his call to prayer with three modifiers; he gives them/us three specifics on *how* to be praying. First,

*Devote yourselves to prayer*

**Devote yourselves**<sup>nasb, niv</sup>, **continue earnestly**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **continue steadfastly**<sup>esv</sup> = *proskartereo* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G2594> (kartereo); **to be earnest towards**, i.e. (to a thing) **to persevere, be constantly diligent**, or (in a place) to attend assiduously all the exercises, or (to a person) to adhere closely to (as a servitor) :- attend (give self) continually (upon), continue (in, instant in, with), wait on (continually); **habitually**.

Luke chose the same word to describe the fresh, early beginnings of the church.

**Read Acts 2:42.**

Of course this does not mean prayer in full-flower (head bowed, on our knees) 24/7. At its root this kind of devotion means that we do not pray as if it is an afterthought, or as something performed halfheartedly, or (worse) by rote. We are earnest about it, and we are persistent—we do not give up when the answer is not received in the first five minutes after our "Amen."

But it also means that we nurture a *life* of prayer. This sort of prayer life must be practiced and nurtured because it is not natural to us; it is a skill that must be developed. In past studies I have likened it to a vibration: all day, every day we go about our lives vibrating to the pitch of heaven, which makes our communion with God—if not literally constant—second nature to us. The Quaker, Thomas Kelly, from the first half of the twentieth century put it this way:

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and *a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings*. (emphasis added)

Thus we never permit the affairs of this world to isolate us from the affairs of the Spirit.

*keeping alert in it*

**keeping alert**<sup>nasb</sup>, **being vigilant**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **being watchful**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *gregorountes* = from <G1453> (egeiro); **to keep awake**, i.e. watch (literal or figurative) :- **be vigilant**, wake, (be) watch (-ful); **be awake and alert**.

Two senses:

- “watch their own life in light of the return of Christ[;] believers need constantly to be awake ‘awake’ to the nature of the times they live in—the ‘last days’—and to orient their lives accordingly[: a] devotion to prayer... characterized by a strong sense of expectation about Christ’s near return that governs and motivates prayer.” (Douglas Moo)
- be “active in prayer, alive in the fullest sense, never careless or mechanical, dull and heavy” (Vaughan).

*with an attitude of thanksgiving.*

**thanksgiving** = *eucharistia* (yoo-char-is-tee'-ah) = from <G2170> (eucharistos); **gratitude**; **active grateful language** (to God, as an act of worship) :- thankfulness, (giving of) thanks (-giving).

*vv3-4*

In v2 Paul tells the Colossians *how* to pray; in vv3-4 he gives them a specific *for which to pray*.

**Read vv3-4.**

The apostle was imprisoned—probably house arrest in Rome—when this was written. Look closely at his prayer request. One would imagine, under such circumstances, that he might ask them to pray “that the emperor would let me out of these infernal chains!” But in his request he almost *personalizes* the gospel word (*logos*). He doesn’t ask for prayer that *he* would be set free, as much as that the *word* would be set free!

*praying...that God will open up to us a door for the word,*

He refers to this in his second letter to Timothy, written shortly before his death.

**Read 2 Timothy 2:8-9.**

Paul may be, but God's word cannot be imprisoned. And if only one can be set free, then Paul says swing wide the door for the gospel of Christ. That word *will* go forth, as the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah,

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
And do not return there without watering the earth  
And making it bear and sprout,  
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;  
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;  
It will not return to Me empty,  
Without accomplishing what I desire,  
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”  
Isaiah 55:10-11

Even when the Catholic church physically chained the Bible to the pulpit, kept it in Latin, so it could only be read and interpreted by clergy alone—even that could not imprison the word, and it burst forth through the work of Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the like.

*so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ...*

But Paul knows that he has been called to carry that word, to declare the “mystery of Christ”—that is, aspects of the gospel message that God had not revealed in the past, but now had been revealed in Christ. [Hebrews 1:1-2]

*that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.*

The NASB translation of v4 is not the best—not inaccurate, just lacking punctuation. The NKJV and ESV are better. Here's the ESV:

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

Why does he ask them to pray for his clarity of speech? We find an answer in his letter to the Romans.

### **Read Romans 1:15-17.**

The gospel is “the power of God for salvation”! Those He calls to deliver that good news must do so eagerly, openly, unashamedly—and *clearly*. The mystery has been removed: It is not a message reserved for the intellectual elite; it is the message of salvation for *anyone* who believes.

### **vv5-6**

After asking them to pray for *his* ministry, Paul's last bit of counsel is about how they are to conduct *their* ministry.

### **Read Colossians 4:5-6.**

### **v5**

Verse five begins with that familiar NT word typically translated “walk,” and quite appropriately translated “conduct yourselves” in the NASB.

**peripateo** = from <G4012> (peri) and <G3961> (pateo); **to tread all around, i.e. walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); **figurative to live, deport oneself**, follow (as a companion or votary) :- go, be occupied with, walk (about).

How are we to conduct ourselves toward those outside the community of faith in Christ? With “wisdom” (*sophia*). Paul doesn’t clarify this at all; he doesn’t spiritualize this wisdom. But he doesn’t really need to, for he has already set that table earlier in the letter. Let’s return for a moment to Chapter Three, where he details for the Colossians how they are to “put on the new self.”

vv1-2: Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

[their wisdom is to come from “above”]

vv10-11: and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

[their wisdom should flow out of a “true knowledge” of God—and in Christ there is equanimity of nationality, race, status]

vv16-17: Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

[their wisdom is based on the “word of Christ” dwelling within them]

And Paul says they are to do this “making the most of the opportunity,” or “making the best use of the time” (ESV). Curtis Vaughan points out that this is a market term that meant “to buy out,” to “purchase completely.”

So Christians, as an expression of practical wisdom, must buy up and make the most of every opportunity for witnessing to the faith.

**v6**

The second way we are to conduct ourselves around unbelievers is with “grace” (*charis*).

### **Read v6.**

Graciousness is kind, patient, understanding, even-tempered. Salt adds flavor, makes the bland more interesting, and can be used as a preservative.

*Douglas J. Moo:* Paul is calling on Christians to speak with their unbelieving neighbors and friends with gracious, warm, and winsome words—all with the purpose of being able to answer unbelievers.

Perhaps the apostle Peter put it best:

...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Peter 3:15)