

PRAY PERSISTENTLY, WALK IN WISDOM, AND WEIGH OUR WORDS (Colossians 4:2-6)

Please take your Bibles and turn to Colossians 4—the last chapter of this letter that we have been looking at for well over a year! In the **first two** chapters, Paul's focus was on teaching and doctrine with an emphasis on the supremacy of Christ—**who** He is and **what** He had done for them. The **last two** chapters—chapters 3 and 4—God through Paul tells them how they—**and we**—are to live in light of who Christ is and what He has done.

--Notice now vs 7. Here Paul mentions Tychicus

--In vs 9, he refers to Onesimus

--In vs 10, Paul writes of Aristarchus and Marcus

I'm not going to read the other names listed in the rest of the letter—there are six—but the point I want you to see is this: in verses 7-18, Paul closes out his letter by giving comments—and commendations—about fellow laborers. In a sense, then, we can think of vs 7-18 like the **credits** that are given at the end of a movie.

And the point of **that** point is this: verses 2-6 are the closing of Paul's instructions on how to live in light of who they are in Christ! And because these verses kind of “wrap up” what Paul previously taught them, they are extremely important! Please follow along as I read these five verses. In the verses I just read, there are two **commands**. The **first** is found in the beginning of verse 2: “Continue in prayer.” The **second** is in the beginning of verse 5: “Walk in wisdom.” And although the phrase “Let your speech be always with grace” is technically **not a command**, it is certainly a desire of Paul's—and of God's—or God wouldn't have had him write it! So what is Paul's “final charge” in his letter to this small church about the danger of false teachers—and the supremacy of Christ? That is what we will be looking at this morning.

1. **Pray persistently—for the spread of the gospel**

We see **pray persistently** in the words “continue in prayer”—and the spread of the gospel in “that God would open unto us a door of utterance...” Before we look at that, though, I want us to consider...

A. Who is to pray

--I think it is important to remind us all from time to time that sometimes God has instructions for specific groups of people—like pastors and teachers. But this is **not the case** here!

--**Who** is God through Paul commanding to “continue in prayer?” According to chapter 1, verse 2: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” In other words, all the true born-again, blood-bought believers that attended the church there—not just the leaders!

--And by extension—**because God** included this letter in His Word—it is to all of us now who are believers—not just to me as the pastor—or the “super spiritual” people (whoever they are) in the church!

--Are **you** a child of God? Is so, **you** are the “**who**”—and God says to **you** “continue in prayer!”

B. The way to pray

So **how are we** as God's people supposed to pray?

First, **1) Persistently**. We see that, of course, in the words: “Continue in prayer.” The Greek word that “**continue**” comes from means: “to devote oneself to, to persist in, to continue steadfastly in.” (Biblehub.com).

--It is used in **Acts 1:14** of a prayer meeting where the disciples—and others, including Jesus' mother Mary and His siblings—“continued with one accord in prayer and supplication....”

--It is also used by Peter in **Acts 6:4** when he tells the believers **why** they need to choose from among them seven men to oversee the feeding of the widows. “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

So what does it **mean** to continue—to be persistent in—prayer? And what will it **look like**? Does it mean we are on our knees **all day long**, doing nothing but praying? No; it doesn't mean that! But it does mean we are devoted to it—and we return to it over and over again!

In other words, it is not “hit and miss”—and it is not “if we get a round-tu-it!”

Prayer is as essential to our **spiritual** health as drinking, eating, and sleeping is to our **physical** health.

Not only are we to pray **persistently**, we are also to pray...

2) Watchfully. Notice again vs 2: “Continue in prayer, and **watch** in the same...” What does **watch** mean? It means to be alert...to stay awake...to be ready...to be vigilant. **Jesus** used the word in connection with being alert and ready for His **sudden and unannounced return** (Mt 24:42; Mt 25:13; Mk 13:35, 37). **Peter** used the same word in a verse familiar to many of us: **1 Peter 5:8** “Be sober, be vigilant [**watchful**]; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

So what does it mean to be “watchful” **in prayer**? It means to be **ready to pray**—anytime, anywhere, for any need and for any person! Sometimes it means praying with **someone over the phone**; other times it means stopping in the middle of a conversation and saying, “Let’s pray right now!”

Nehemiah comes to mind as an example of someone who was ready to pray at a moment’s notice. Nehemiah was a Jewish man but was born in Babylon because God’s people had been exiled there by King Nebuchadnezzar. The Medes and Persians conquered Babylon and Nehemiah became the cupbearer for the Persian King Artaxerxes I.

As the king’s cupbearer, Nehemiah was in the presence of the king every single day—and Nehemiah had never been sad in his presence—until he got some news about Jerusalem! When the king asked what was wrong, notice Nehemiah’s reply on your outline in **Nehemiah 2:3-5a**: “...why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?” Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? **So I prayed to the God of heaven.** And I said unto the king...”

You see the picture, right? The king asked Nehemiah, ‘What would you like from me?’ Nehemiah shoots up a pray to God in his heart, then answers the king’s question. That is being watchful—ready—to pray!

How are we to pray? First, persistently. Second, watchfully.

Third, **3) Thankfully.** Once again, we see that in verse 2: “...and watch in the same with thanksgiving.”

Prayer isn’t **just asking**, is it? A couple of months ago I shared with our Wednesday Bible study group different elements of prayer using the acrostic **A-C-T-S**: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

Part of our praying should include **thanksgiving** because it says it here in **this** verse—but it also says it in Col 3:17! “Whatsoever ye do...” certainly **includes praying**—and involves “giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”

Should we be thankful for what God **has done**? Paul certainly told them they should be! Christ is the **Creator** of all—and rules over all. Not only that, they had received the **forgiveness of sins**—and had been **transferred** from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ—because Jesus had paid for their sins by His death on the cross!

But I believe thanksgiving in prayer is more than just thanking God for what He **has done**. It is also a thankfulness based **on faith** in what God **can** do—and is **going** to do!

--Faith says that the One who created everything (Colossians 1:16)—and holds everything together (Colossians 1:17)—is **more than powerful enough** to do anything that needs to be done!

--And faith says that the One who took me—His enemy—and not only forgave me (Colossians 1:14) but is going to present me to God as “holy and unblameable and unproveable” (Colossians 1:22) most certainly **loves me!**

--And faith says that Christ—the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge dwell—will surely do the **best and wisest thing** concerning me.

--And that faith leads to thanksgiving in prayer—before the answer comes—because God **is good** and **does good!** What about us? Does persistence...and readiness...and thanksgiving characterize how we pray?

Next, let’s consider... C. The “what” to pray for

--The “what” Paul says to pray for—found in verses 3-4—is where it gets interesting—and convicting!

--**What** does Paul want the Colossian believers to pray for? We have the answer beginning in vs 3; notice what it says: “Withal [at the same time] praying **also for us...**”

First, 1) Pray for laborers who share the gospel.

--**Who** is the “us”? Paul’s fellow laborers like Timothy (Col 1:1), Epaphras (Col 1:7; 4:12), and Tychicus (Col 4:7)—to name a few. Paul prayed for the Colossians (1:3 and 1:9), now he asks them to **pray for him and his co-workers** who share the gospel—the good news—that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

--What about **you**? You obviously can’t pray **for Paul**—he’s enjoying the presence of the Lord! But do you pray **for me**? That is most certainly a proper application of this verse. But don’t just pray for me! We should also pray for the missionaries that we know and support, as well as for one another to be better “sharers” of the gospel. And let’s not forget to ask the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers into His harvest (Mt 9:38).

Second, Paul asks them to... **2) Pray for open doors to share the gospel.** We see that in the rest of vs 3; notice again what it says. Let that sink in: Paul is in prison for “speaking the mystery of Christ,” but instead of asking for the **prison** doors to be open so he can get out, he asks for **gospel** doors to be open so he can preach Christ more! What is a “gospel” door? It is the **opening of an opportunity** to share the message of Christ—and he understands that God is the opener of this kind of door!

Paul and Silas had both a **prison** door and **gospel** door open to them while in jail at Philippi in Acts 16. They sang at midnight, God sent an earthquake that opened the prison doors—and caused their chains to fall off—and the prison keeper said to them both, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Talk about an open door!

What about us? Do we pray for open doors—both for ourselves and others—to share the message of Christ? Please don’t let the word “mystery” in this verse throw you off. The message of Christ is not mysterious or impossible to understand. We learned back in Colossians 1:26-27 that a “mystery” is something that was previously unknown, but has now been revealed—and that is how Paul is using it here.

Third, **3) Pray for clarity in sharing the gospel.** We see that in vs 4 “That I may make it manifest”—clear, plain—“as I ought to speak.” Fascinating, isn’t it? The man whom God used to write in great detail about the gospel—to include “The Romans Road”—asked others to pray for him so he could share the gospel more clearly! And since God led Paul to record that desire—and need—in His Word, it is certainly something we should be praying for as well! We should **know how** to share the message of salvation with others—and **work at it** according to the end of vs 6—and yet our **dependence needs to be on God** to open doors...and hearts... and help us present His word in a clear and understandable way.

Second, in verse 5, we see... **2. Walk in wisdom for the spread of the gospel**

Paul didn’t want the Colossians just to **pray** for him and his fellow coworkers to be used by God in the spread of the gospel—he wanted them to be **involved in spreading** the gospel, too!

How do we know? Because the command to “walk in wisdom” has to do with their relationship “toward them that are without”—meaning those who are outside the family of God!

A. The meaning of walk

What does “walk” mean? **David Pao** writes: “‘Walk’ is the Jewish way of speaking about leading a way of life.” (*Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Colossians and Philemon*, pg 295). How important is it to live our lives differently after we become a child of God? Important enough for Paul to mention it in every chapter of this letter!

--Colossians 1:10 “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord...”

--Colossians 2:6 “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him:”

--Colossians 3:7 “In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.”

B. The manner of their walk

--**How** were they to walk? What was their manner of life to be like?

--Their walk—their way of living—was to be characterized by what? **Wisdom.**

--And just like the word “walk,” Paul mentions the importance of **wisdom** in each of the four chapters!

For the sake of time, I’ll just give you two:

--Colossians 2:3 “In whom [Christ] are hid all the treasures of **wisdom** and knowledge.”

--Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all **wisdom**; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

1) Where does wisdom come from?

--From the verses we just looked at, we see that it comes **from Christ**—through the **word** of Christ—meaning the Word of God. We also know from the **Old Testament** that wisdom comes from the **Word of God**.

--Proverbs 2:3-6 "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

⁴If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; ⁵Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. ⁶**For the Lord giveth wisdom**: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

--We also know from Proverbs 9:10 that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

So wisdom comes from the **fear** of God and the **Word** of God.

2) What does walking in wisdom look like? At least three things should be evident.

--One is **humility**. Wisdom recognizes who God is...and who we are...and how often we fail to live in a way that pleases Him. If that doesn't bring humility, I'm not sure what will!

--Another is **obedience**. Wisdom and **disobedience** **do not** go hand in hand! In Matthew 7:24-27, both the wise man and foolish man **heard** the words of Jesus. **The difference** between the two? The wise man heard—**and obeyed**—while the foolish man did not obey!

--And yet a **third** way walking in wisdom will look like is "redeeming the time." Ephesians 5:15 says we are to "redeem the time, because the days are evil." To "redeem the time" means to make the most of each opportunity. And in order to **make the most** of each opportunity, we need to be **prepared** for the opportunity when it comes! The opportunity to do **what**? Share the gospel message with people!

3) What will a walk of wisdom result in?

--The end of vs 6 says, "...that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." The implication is that walking in wisdom may lead people to **ask us questions**—something that Peter also wrote about.

--I Peter 3:15 "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and **be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you** with meekness and fear:"

And Jesus Himself taught that if your life is different, people will notice!

--Mt 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Lastly—in vs 6—Paul tells them and us to... **3. Weigh our words**

"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

Both our **works**—and our **words**—can have a positive or negative impact on people, can't they? Walking in wisdom can attract people to the gospel—but they still need to **hear** the gospel! So we do need to "talk"—not just "walk!" What should our words be like?

A. Always with grace

Commentators disagree as to what exactly is meant by **grace**. Does it mean our presentation of the gospel should emphasize **God's grace**—or does it mean we should speak to people in a **gracious** way?

--And the answer is...**yes**—to both! Sadly, most people think that their good works will save them.

--How do we combat that? By emphasizing that salvation is by grace alone...through faith alone...in Christ alone!

--But we need to do that in a **gracious** way! Steven Cole put it like this: "As a sinner who has received grace, you don't speak in a condescending or condemning manner to another sinner. You are kind and humble, letting the other person know that we're all sinners who would be on the way to hell, were it not for God's grace." (Colossians Lesson 28: Private Prayer, Public Witness (Colossians 4:2-6); Bible.org)

--Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Our speech should also be... B. Seasoned with salt

Once again, commentators disagree as to exactly what Paul meant by this phrase. In **classical Greek**, “seasoned with salt” meant that a person was **witty**. Are we to be “witty” when we share the gospel with people? I tend to think that would detract from the seriousness of the message.

Salt in Paul’s day had two primary uses—to resist the corruption of meat, but also to add flavor! We certainly need to use spiritually pure and wholesome words when sharing God’s Word—but we should also do so in a way that creates thirst in a person so they want to hear more!

C. Tailored to each person

We see that in the end of vs 6 “...that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” The idea in the Greek is this: “that we may know how to answer each person individually.” (NIBC—*Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, Arthur Patzia, pg 97).

Every person is **different**—and every person **learns** in a different way. Cole points out that Jesus never used the same approach twice. Instead, Jesus tailored His conversation to that person’s need and situation.

We can—and should—have a **general idea** of what we want to share during a conversation with someone, but we need to be **led by the Lord** to say what will be most helpful to that person in their situation.

And due to our self-consciousness, it doesn’t come naturally! We need to prepare...and practice...and pray! And we need to make it more of a priority! It certainly was Paul’s priority! That’s why he asked the Colossians to pray for open doors for him—and for them to use their walk and words to witness for Christ!

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. First, I mentioned the word “gospel” 21 times this morning—and now 22—without really defining it!

--What is the gospel? It literally means “good news.”

--What is the good news?

The **good news** is that God has provided a way for sinners to be forgiven—and live with Him in heaven—forever—after they die!

--But first the **bad** news! What’s the bad news!

--Only **perfect** people can get into heaven!

--But none of us are perfect—meaning we are all disqualified!

--And if that’s not bad enough, **nothing we do** can make us qualified!

Baptism, being good, giving money, joining a church—none of those things can take away our sin!

--Now for the **good** news: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

--God left heaven—in the person of His Son—and lived a perfect life!

--And because He was perfect, He could die in our place! So His death on the cross was a payment for our sins as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

--And because God Himself provided the payment, God is obviously satisfied with the payment—and proved it by raising Jesus from the dead!

--It is all of grace—and it is a gift! But it must be received—as a gift—in humility, repentance, and faith!

--Have you received God’s gift? Why not do that today?

2. Second—if you are a child of God—are you praying for the spread of the gospel?

--That is something we can all do—and God puts great emphasis on that in the verses we looked at.

--Pray for open doors for me...and missionaries...and one another...and yourself!

--And pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers!