

PAUL'S PASTORAL PRIORITIES (Colossians 4:12-18)

Take your Bibles and turn once again to Colossians 4. Although we looked at verses 7-11 last Sunday, I want to read those verses again to remind us of a few things we looked at last week—and lay the context for what Paul says at the end of his letter. Please follow along as I read verses 7-18.

Last week—in verses 7-9—we noted **Paul's personal interest** in the Colossian believers. Paul **sent messengers** to them...from where he was imprisoned in Rome...to let them know how he was doing—even though he had **never once** visited their church! **Why** did he want them to know **how he was doing**? Was he being egotistical?

Was his mindset, 'Everyone wants to know how **I'm doing** because I'm the Apostle Paul?' **No**; that wasn't his mindset at all! Paul **wanted them to know** how he was doing because Epaphras—a **friend** of Paul's and the **founder** of the church in Colosse—told Paul they wanted to know! So Paul sent Tychichus—and Onesimus—1000 miles to let the Colossians know how Paul was! But it was a **two-way street** because Paul also wanted to know **how they were** doing—and to encourage them in their fight against false teachers!

Second, in verses 10-11, Paul sends greetings from three Jewish co-workers—Aristarchus, Marcus, and Jesus called Justus. Although the three men were very different, they had one thing in common—besides being co-workers: they had been a **comfort** to Paul. As mentioned last week, the word "comfort" here means "to speak or counsel in a soothing way"—like medicine that takes away pain and discomfort" (HELPS Word-studies; Biblehub.com; Strong's 3931). What **did they say to Paul** that was "soothing" to him?

We **don't know** because the Bible doesn't say! But we do **know this**: Paul was not a "one-man-show"—he needed co-workers and he needed comforters! And if Paul needed those things, I certainly do, too!

And that brings us to verses 12-18. At first glance, it seems like they don't really have **anything in common**.

--In vs 12, Paul sends them a greeting from Epaphras

--In vs 14, he sends them a greeting from Luke and Demas

--But in vs 15, they are to greet people on Paul's behalf.

--In vs 16, they are told to read a letter that he sent to a sister church

--And in vs 17, they are to encourage Archippus to "take heed to the ministry which he had received in the Lord."

But as I read...and re-read... and thought about these verses, there seems to be **one common thread** that is interwoven throughout them. **What** is that thread? You already know from the title of the message that I believe they point to what Paul considered **priorities** in pastoral ministry. There are probably more, but I will be sharing with you **four** of them here this morning.

1. Praying for God's people (vs 12a)

Did Paul believe that praying was a priority for pastors? **Yes**; he did! How do we know? Because Paul—in this letter to the Colossians—emphasizes two examples of pastors who prayed for them!

First, A. The example of Epaphras

--We see that in Colossians 4:12 "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, **always labouring fervently** for you in prayers..."

--**Who** is Epaphras? We were introduced to him in Colossians 1:7-8 where we learn that he is a "dear fellow-servant" of Paul and Timothy's—and was a faithful minister of Christ to them. They had heard the gospel from him—and it brought forth fruit in them—meaning he was the "church planter" of the church in Colosse as mentioned in the introduction.

--Epaphras was also the one who **brought the news of the Colossians** to Paul—and his concern regarding the false teaching of false teachers.

--And here—also in Colossians 4:12—we see that Epaphras is a servant of Christ who is **still with Paul**. That is why Paul writes that he "saluteth [greet]s you."

--**What** does Paul emphasize the most about Epaphras? That he is “always labouring fervently for you in prayers...” “**Always**”—not once in a while. “**Labouring fervently**” comes from the Greek word “ah-go-NEE-zoh-my”—the word we get our English word “agonize” from. It means “to fight, compete for a prize, and contend with an adversary.” (Biblehub.com). Is Paul being a bit dramatic using such a strong word to describe prayer? --Not at all! **Why?** Because praying is **hard work!** **Why** is praying **hard work?** Because **we fight** our sin nature when we pray...and we fight the devil when we pray! And both are stronger than we are! But “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Epaphras wasn’t the only example of a praying pastor that Paul mentions in this letter, though. He actually began the letter by telling them that **he himself prayed** for them!

So secondly, we have... B. The example of Paul

--Look back at Col 1:3 “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **praying always for you,**” --Col 1:9 “For this cause we also, since the day we heard of it, **do not cease to pray for you...**”

Paul was a preacher...and church planter...and mentor to other pastors—like Titus and Timothy and Tychicus and Archippus. But he was also a **man of prayer**—in spite of how “busy” he was! Sadly, most pastors—including yours—have to fight hard not to neglect their prayer-time when they get busy. And my guess is that that is **also true of you!**

But busyness should **drive us to pray**—not away from prayer! **Why?** Because busyness should remind us that we need **God’s wisdom** to know what to do...and **strength from God to do it!** **Martin Luther**—as quoted by Spurgeon—famously said, “I have so much business to do today, that I shall not be able to get through it with less than three hours of prayer.” (<https://deeperchristian.com/are-you-too-busy-to-pray/>)

So one of the priorities of a pastor is to pray for God’s people—and Paul emphasizes that by pointing to the example of both Epaphras and himself.

But Paul doesn’t just tell them that pastors **should pray** for God’s people, he also tells them **what they should ask God** to do in—and for—God’s people. Notice again vs 12. **What** is it that Epaphras prayed for? That the Colossian believers “may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Priority 2, then, is that pastors should be... **2. Promoters of God’s will (vs 12b)**

How do we know that promoting God’s will was a priority of Paul’s? Because of all the things that Epaphras could have—and probably did—pray for, Paul highlights **this one!** But what does Paul mean by standing “perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

A. An explanation of “perfect and complete in all the will of God”

--“Perfect” here—as is often the case—does not mean sinless. It comes from the Greek word “TEH-lei-os” and means “complete, full grown, mature.” So if “**perfect**” means “**complete**,” what does “**complete**” mean?

--The Greek word that “**complete**” comes from is used only **six** times in the Greek NT. In three of the six, the KJV translates it “surely believed or fully persuaded” (Lk 1:1; Rom 4:21; 14:5)—and that meaning fits the context here.

--Putting the two thoughts together, the prayer of Epaphras was for them to “stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (ESV, Berean Literal Bible). But **what**—in a **practical sense**—does that mean?

--**Warren Wiersbe** put it like this: “Full assurance in the will of God’ is a tremendous blessing! It is not necessary for the believer to drift in life. He can know God’s will and enjoy it. As he learns God’s will and lives it, he matures in the faith and experiences God’s fullness.” (Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor) as quoted in Precept Austin (https://www.preceptaustin.org/colossians_412-18#4:12).

So the priority of Epaphras—as seen in what Paul says he prayed for—was for the Colossians to mature and be fully assured that they were doing all God wanted them to do! And that was **Paul’s priority**, too!

B. The example of Paul

How do we know that Paul wanted the Colossians to be mature believers—and do the will of God? Because he had written to them about that way back in the **beginning** of the letter! Please turn once again to Colossians 1; notice what it says in verse 9.

--So what does Paul pray for? For them to be filled with the knowledge of **God's will!**

--**Why** did Paul want the Colossians to **know** the will of God? Did he want them to **know** God's will so they could **evaluate it** and **decide** if they wanted to follow it or not? **No!** He wanted them to **know** the will of God so they would **do** the will of God!

--We see that in verse 10: "That ye might **walk worthy of the Lord** unto all pleasing..." Paul wanted them to **know** God's will—and **do** God's will—so their lives would be **pleasing** to God!

--And—just like Epaphras—Paul also wanted them to be **mature** believers! We see that in Colossians 1:28; notice what it says. Paul prayed...and preached...and warned...and taught the Colossians with the goal of presenting them to God as mature believers!

So the heartbeat of Epaphras—and Paul—was for believers to be mature in Christ-likeness and have full assurance that what they were doing was the will of God!

--And I can honestly say that that is my heartbeat, too! I would love nothing more than to have each and every one of us wholeheartedly seek to **know and do** what God wants us each of us to do!

--And God obviously wants that, too! So **why** don't we? Why are we so unconcerned and indifferent about seeking God's will? Why is it not the priority that it should be?

What were Paul's pastoral priorities? Pastors should: 1) Pray for God's people and 2) Promote God's will.

Thirdly, Pastors should be... **3. Passionate about God's Word (vs 16)**

--This one may not be as obvious as the previous two, but we see Paul emphasizing the Word of God in vs 16. Notice what it says: "And **when** this epistle **is** read among you..."

--Paul doesn't say "**if** this epistle is read among you"—he says, "**when** it is read among you." Why did he say "when"—and not "if?" Because he **expected it to be read!**

--And since he expected it **to be read**, he also expected it to be **listened to** when it was read!

--But Paul's expectation didn't end there, did it? He expected his letters to **be read**...and **listened to**...and **obeyed!**

--Not only that, but we also see in the same verse that Paul wanted this letter to be read **in the church of the Laodiceans**—and that they were to read the letter that he sent to them. But **why? Why** was Paul so **passionate** about these letters being read? There are probably more, but here are two.

A. Because of **Who** they were from

--The "Who," of course, was not Paul! Paul was the **human** instrument, but **God** was the author! **How much** did the writers of Scripture—like Paul—**understand** that they were writing God's Word? It's hard to say for sure! But Paul writes some things that suggest he knew he was getting revelation from God!

--**I Corinthians 11:23** "For I have **received of the Lord** that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread:" Here Paul says that what he shared with them, he had received from the Lord! Was that from the **teachings** of Jesus—or **directly from** Jesus? Probably both!

--In II Corinthians 12:7, Paul writes about his "thorn in the flesh." Why was he given it? "And lest I should be exalted above measure **through the abundance of the revelations...**" In essence, Paul is saying that God had given him an abundance of revelations—revealed truth from God—and to stop him from being proud about that, God gave him this "thorn in the flesh."

--**Galatians 1:11-12** "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the **revelation of Jesus Christ.**"

Who does Paul say he got the gospel from? Man didn't **give** it to him—and man didn't **teach** it to him. The gospel was revealed to him directly by Jesus Christ. Is this only a reference to what happened to him on the road to Damascus? Maybe—but maybe not!

--One more, but this one is from Peter. In II Peter 3:16, Peter—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—puts Paul's—his letters—on equal ground with the Old Testament Scriptures!

What about us? Do we look at this Book as being from God? We better because He is the author!

A second reason Paul was passionate about the Word of God is...

B. Because of why it was given

Why did God give us the Word of God? That's a sermon in *itself*—if not a *series* of sermons! I'm obviously not going to start over and preach another sermon, but I am going to **highlight a few things** that Paul wrote to them about the Word of God. Let's go back, once again, to chapter 1.

--In vs 5, Paul reminds them that their hope—meaning their expectation of dwelling with God in heaven after they die—was something that they had heard and learned of from “the word of the truth of the gospel”

--In vs 6, we see that when the word of truth came to them, it brought forth fruit in them. They learned of—and experienced—the **grace** of God through the **word** of God!

--In vs 23, the gospel is what grounds them and settles them and gives them the content of what they are to believe.

--And in Colossians 3:16, Paul commands them to have the word of Christ—meaning the word of God—dwell in them. How? **Richly**—not poorly! **Abundantly**—not barely there! **A large quantity**—not scarcely present!

Why? So they could **teach and admonish** one another! God wants His Word to dwell richly in each one of us so each one of us can **teach (instruct)** one another—and each of us can **admonish (meaning warn)** one another! Stated another way, God's Word gives us what we need so we know **what to believe**—and how **to behave!**

What about you—and what about me? Does God's Word dwell in us richly? Are you satisfied with your “intake” and “uptake” of the Word of God? If not, could it be because you don't consider it what **it really is**: the Word of God?

So what were Paul's pastoral priorities seen at the end of this letter? Pastors should: 1) Pray for God's people, 2) promote God's will, 3) be passionate about God's Word and lastly, they should be...

4. Purposeful in doing God's work (vs 17)

We see that in verse 17; notice what it says.

A. The man

So who is this man named “Archippus”? His name is only mentioned twice in the Bible—here and in the book of Philemon. Notice on your outline **Philemon 1-2** “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:”

Although we can't be dogmatic, many Bible scholars believe that **Apphia** was Philemon's wife...and that **Archippus** was their son...and that the church at Colosse met at their home. Others suggest that the church met only in the house of Archippus—“to the church in thy house” and that the three were not related.

B. The ministry

There is also disagreement as to what Paul meant by “ministry.” Some suggest **he was a deacon** because the Greek word that “ministry” comes from is the same Greek word that we get the word “deacon” from.

David Pao, however, points out that the word can mean “work, task, or service.” Pao then adds, “In light of the phrase, ‘in the Lord’...this service is likely related to the gospel ministry.” (David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Colossians & Philemon*, pg 321).

In other words, Archippus was a pastor—and he probably was put in charge of the flock while Epaphras was in Rome visiting Paul.

C. The mandate

This—to me—is where it gets interesting. Look again at vs 17 “And say to Archippus...”

--**Who** is Paul writing to? All the believers of the church in Colosse—not just the leaders.

--**What** is Paul telling them to do? Paul is telling the people in the pew to tell their pastor to do his job!

--Did that mean he wasn't doing it? Maybe—but not necessarily!

--Maybe he was young and needed encouragement—or maybe he was discouraged. We don't know for sure.

But we do know this: In order for them to **want** their pastor to do his job, they have to **want to hear** the Word of God—and **do what they hear and learn** from the Word of God!

Here's what this would look like.

"Hey Pastor, do your job!"

--'Okay, but my job is to "preach the Word and reprove and rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"' (II Timothy 4:2).

--"We know, Pastor—and that is what we want you to do!"

--'And my job is to equip you to "do the work of the ministry" (Eph 4:12).

--"We know, Pastor—and we want to be equipped!"

--'And my job is to teach you how to become more like Christ' (Col 1:28).

--"We know, Pastor—and we want to become more like Christ!"

--'And my job is to remind you that the word of Christ is to dwell in you richly' (Col 3:16).

--"We know, Pastor—and we want to be reminded of that!"

That is the heart that Paul expected the Colossian believers to have in order for them to say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."

Am I wrong to suggest that that is the heart that God wants you to have?

I don't believe so!

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

There are a number of things, but here are **two** I want to highlight.

1. First, what is your view of the Bible? Art likes to say that BIBLE stands for "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth!"

--And the most important instructions God gives us is how to make sure we're going to heaven after we leave earth!

--How can we be certain we will go to heaven after we die?

--By having Christ, right? We need our sins paid for—and we need Christ's perfectness credited to us!

And that can only happen by coming to God in humility and repentance, then receiving Jesus for ourselves.

Have you done that? Has there been a time in your life when you personally received Jesus your Savior?

2. Second, how serious are you about finding—and doing—the will of God? It should be the heartbeat of all of us, shouldn't it?

--Where do we find the will of God? In the word of God!

--Too many times we make it too hard by not doing the things we know we should do.

--And let's not forget James 1:5.