



COLOSSIANS

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Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; Colossians 4:2

Paul lays heavy stress on the need for prayer in his epistles. In 1 Thessalonians 5, he tells his readers to “pray without ceasing.” The same thought is expanded upon here. He tells those in Colossae (and thus us!) to continue in prayer (as in praying without ceasing), but he tells them to do so in an earnest, steadfast manner. There should be a vibrancy in their prayer life, as if it is a natural extension of their very being.

The idea of continuing earnestly in prayer does not mean that we get on our knees and stay there all day without accomplishing anything else. There are many types of prayers, and the admonition fits any of them at any given time. There are formal prayers and informal prayers. There are silent prayers of the heart given in our times of distress or deep need, and there are vocal prayers which are given to build up others for courage, comfort, or edification. There are secret prayers, given between oneself and God which reveal the innermost soul of the one praying. There are public prayers offered for gatherings of God's people as they meet to worship or petition Him. There are prepared prayers which are meticulously worded in order to inspire deep conviction, reverence, or courage. And there are sudden prayers which leap out of our souls as we come upon a moment of need.

Paul's admonition to “continue earnestly in prayer” is one which should be taken literally. There is never a time that we can simply talk to God and it not be considered a prayer. He next expands upon his words by saying “being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.”

In life, we often get sidetracked by things that come our way, and our minds tend to wander from our connection with the Lord. Paul tells us that we are to be vigilant, or watchful, ensuring that we don't let go of our prayer life. And in our prayers, we are to add in thanksgiving. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, he admonishes, “...in everything give thanks.” It is the same thought here. If we are praying continuously, and if we are giving thanks in all of our prayers, then we are giving thanks continuously. This attitude should be a constant part of who we are at all times.

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

Life application: How easy it is to not be thankful. We simply forget about the many kindnesses which come to us. But if we can remember to be in prayer always, and that thanksgiving should be a part of those prayers, then we will not fall into the state of ingratitude. It takes mental effort, but it can be done. Don't let the world of whining and griping get you down. Instead, let the spiritual connection you have with God be nurtured to a state of constant vibrancy.

...meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, Colossians 4:3

Paul has just exhorted those at Colossae to remain vigilant in prayer with thanksgiving. He then asks them, "...meanwhile praying for us." If prayer served no purpose except acting as some type of pressure relief valve, he would never ask for such a thing. But Paul firmly believed that prayers were something which were effective in determining outcomes. As he desired a certain outcome for himself and those with him, he specifically requests it now, desiring "that God would open a door to us for the word."

Paul uses this same "door" terminology in 1 Corinthians 16:9 and 2 Corinthians 2:12. This was Paul's great desire, but it was something that was currently denied, at least partially. Being in chains, he had a very limited opportunity to share the word. But he was in chains for doing exactly that. He was hoping that it would again be possible to communicate the word, not just in letters, but in person. Therefore, "a door for the word" is probably initially a reference to being released from prison. With such a release, along with the Lord leading the way in new evangelism, he would then be able "to speak the mystery of Christ."

The mystery of Christ is everything involved in the gospel that brings salvation to mankind. A mystery in the Bible is something that cannot be deduced without specific explanation. For each person who has never heard about the work of Christ, there is no way for them to be reconciled to God. Therefore, it is a mystery to them. Paul desired that he would be able to share this mystery so that salvation could come to whoever heard it and received it. But in his sharing it in the past, there were unfortunate consequences. He notes that it was because of speaking the mystery of Christ that he was "also in chains."

His imprisonment was brought about because of his desire to speak about Christ, and yet he wanted to get right back out there and start speaking once again. If it meant future imprisonment, that was of no matter. He would speak until he could speak no more. It was for this ability to get out and share the word that he requested prayers.

Life application: How many people have you shared the message of Jesus with lately? People are dying and being eternally separated from God because of a failure to communicate. Are you a part of this failed system? Or are you opening your mouth and speaking? The Bible says,

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” Simple gospel instructions: Meet person; open mouth; speak.

...that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Colossians 4:4

Paul has asked for prayers for himself and those who were his fellow workers, and then to explain that further, he said they were to open a door for him to speak the mystery of Christ. He then noted that it was for this reason that he was in chains. Going back to the request for prayer now, he says that his desire is that he “might make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” The word “it” is speaking of “the mystery of Christ.”

He is already in chains, and so he is asking that an effective door be opened to him to speak this mystery even while in chains. It is not to discount prayers for release, which would be an open door, but whether in chains or whether free, he is praying for opportunities to speak the words which would make the mystery of Christ manifest to those he would meet. His words show that he cared less about being in chains than he did about getting the message of salvation out to the people he encountered. His desire was first and foremost for an effective door to be opened to him in order to speak. It is a mark of the true inward-burning evangelist.

Life application: Do you encounter people and think, “I need to tell this person about Jesus”? Or do you just look for a normal social interaction and then move on? If you aren’t hoping to share Christ, it would be good for you to pray about your attitude, and to embolden yourself to open your mouth and speak. Whose job is it to tell others about Jesus? The answer is, “Each one of us.”

Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. Colossians 4:5

The words are similar to Ephesians 5:15, 16 -

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, **16** redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

In exhorting believers to “Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside,” he is saying that we are to act in a manner which is above reproach. Everything we do is to be done fairly, with integrity of heart, and with the goal of being the finest example of emulation that those around us can find. In acting in this way, we are more likely to win them over to Christ. “Those *who are* outside” is referring specifically to non-believers. We should obviously act this way among believers, but Paul instructs that we should act this way at all times. If we deal one way with believers and another with unbelievers, it would – all by itself – demonstrate a lack of integrity that would certainly not be worthy of emulation. Who would want to follow the path

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

of a hypocrite, unless they too were already hypocrites? And what Christian wants to be surrounded by a bunch of hypocrites?

The title of “Christian” should be carried by people who are wise, honest, and filled with integrity. And in that capacity, walking in this way toward those who are outside, we will be “redeeming the time.”

The word “redeeming” comes from the Greek word *eksagorázō*. It is a combination of two other words, *ek*, which indicates “completely *out from*.” This intensifies the word *agorázō*, which means, to “buy-up at the marketplace.” In this then, it indicates to “take *full advantage* of, seizing a buying-opportunity, i.e. making the most of the *present opportunity* (recognizing its *future gain*)” (HELPS Word Studies).

In the few hours that we have each day, in the short number of days we have each week, and in the quickly fading weeks, months, and years of our lives, we need to take advantage of the time we have been given, pursuing the greater and weightier matters which have eternal significance.

Instead of whining about what is bad, we should praise for what is good. Instead of moaning of our situation, we should be in prayer for the needs of others, and for the glory of God. Instead of reading novels which satisfy our minds for a moment, we should read and study God’s word which will enrich our souls for eternity. Rather than telling others about the latest sports statistics, we should tell others about the great deeds of the Lord and the love of God found in Christ Jesus. These are the type of things we should pursue in order to redeem the time.

In such ways, and in relation to those who are non-believers, we will be using our time in a manner which is properly directed toward their eyes and hearts. We will be bringing them closer to, not pushing them away from, a relationship with Christ.

Life application: Those around us are watching. Many are perverse and will never come to Christ. Instead, they are enemies of soundness and right reason. But there are those who are evaluating the world around them, searching for answers to life’s difficult questions. If they see us filled with joy, contentment, and peace, they will want that. If we act in this manner towards them, they will want it even more. Such should be the conduct of our walk.

Let your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Colossians 4:6

Paul continues to give exhortations for sound Christian living. In the previous verse, he noted appropriate conduct, or “walk.” Now he moves to appropriate speech by saying, “Let your speech always *be* with grace.” The Greek literally reads, “in grace.” It is the element in which

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speech is to be saturated. Our speech should be happy, sincere, filled with humility, etc. It should pour fourth from the pitcher of grace like sap pours fourth sweet syrup from the tree.

He then says that our speech should also be “seasoned with salt.” The use of salt goes back to the Old Testament offerings. It says in Leviticus 2:13 –

“And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.”

Salt has exactly the opposite effect of leaven or honey in the Bible. These were forbidden to be in almost all offerings because they signify sin and corruption. Salt, on the other hand, produces and signifies incorruption. It strengthens the food in which it is, and also preserves it. Thus, it is a sign of faithfulness and covenant keeping. It goes so far as to indicate the perpetual nature of a covenant. It will never be broken as long as it is in force. Jesus refers to the use of salt in sacrifices in Mark 9:49, 50 –

“For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.
⁵⁰Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”

The inclusion of salt in the Old Testament offerings pictures Christ’s incorruption; He having never sinned before God. It represents His covenant keeping nature, and even as One who will never break the covenant He makes. Paul would have us emulate Christ in our speech, using words of strengthening, incorruption, and preservation of all that is good.

His words in this verse are given as if directing a meal of delicious conduct concerning our speech. And this is so “that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” Each person that one encounters is an individual. We cannot gear our speech to just one approach, but it needs to be modified for the sake of the one we are talking to. But in that speech, we are to draw from the well of grace, and add in the seasoning of salt at all times. We are to be able to give a reason for the hope we possess, we are to do it in meekness and fear, and we are to be courteous and sincere as we utter forth our words.

Life application: How easy it is to let our words slip into that which is profane and even harmful. But we are admonished to not allow this to happen. If what we say is drawn from a nurturing well of grace and then seasoned with salt, it will be helpful, not harmful. It will be soothing and able to build up others instead of tearing them down. Let us strive to meet this goal at all times so that Christ will be exalted by our words.

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