

Paul's Letter to the Colossians
Week 5
Colossians 4:1-18

Day One

I Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

v. 1 – Paul had addressed the attitudes and work ethic of slaves and then he made a comment to slave owners. He urged them to do what was right and fair where their slaves were concerned. If we substitute the word “employer” for “master,” we have a good guideline for modern companies. I find it interesting that Paul made any comment at all to the slave masters, who probably had broad latitude to treat their slaves as they saw fit.

James also addressed the “employer” issue in his letter:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you (James 5:1-6).

If you are an employer, are you obtaining wealth based on the sweat of others, without adequately rewarding them? If you will be an employer one day, now is a good time to determine what kind of employer you will be. Spell out your values now, before you have power and money, for both those items are intoxicating influences and can skew your Christian values if you don't take precautions in advance.

Masters and employers must be mindful that they too have a Master in heaven who is watching what they do and will reward them accordingly, just as He does their slaves. I wonder how many less labor unions we would have need for if employers would heed this simple mandate – do what is fair and right, not necessarily what is profitable.

In fact, if you are in business at all, it would be a valuable exercise to study what the Bible has to say about business ethics and then apply them to your work, whether you are a master or a slave, an employer or an employee. I find the book of Proverbs particularly helpful in such a study of business ethics and practices.

Day Two

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

v. 2 – Paul urged the Colossians to pray. **Are you satisfied with the level of prayer in your life? What more can you do to pray more? What activities must you stop to have more time? What can you adjust in your current lifestyle to make more time?**

Once again Paul instructed the Colossians to be thankful, along with being watchful. Thanksgiving is essential to a good prayer life, for you must be mindful of how God is already working in your life so that you can seek Him for new things. Paul also instructed them to be watchful. I don't think this was being watchful only for dangerous things, although that is important, but also for opportunities to engage in purposeful ministry and work.

Last year I was returning from Africa and was on the plane praying and thanking God for a safe and productive trip. It was there that I had an idea for a media program. I wrote down my idea and followed through to start the program six months later. If you are praying and you have ideas, they *must* be from the Lord and you *have* to take them seriously. The devil will not be talking to you when you pray and thank God for His goodness and mercy. **Does this make sense? If so, will you pay closer attention to your ideas when you pray?**

Many books have been written about prayer, and one of the common themes is that prayer isn't just talking but also listening. God will speak to you when you pray and you should expect that to happen. God talked and counseled with Adam in the Garden and Jesus came to restore the intimate relationship that man once had with God. **What difference is prayer making in your life? What has God "spoken" to you lately?**

v. 3 – Paul was writing this letter from prison, thus he spoke of his chains. Paul never let his circumstances prevent him from being productive and fruitful. He was in jail, yet he was writing to a church he had never visited to encourage and instruct the Body there. **Are you making excuses for why you cannot be productive, or are you doing what you can with what you have where you are?**

Paul's prayer request was not that he would be freed from his chains, but that he would have an open door for his message of the mystery of Christ. We discussed the word "mystery" in an earlier study; it means something that once was not understood clearly but now is. The mystery of Christ for Paul was that Jesus came for all people, including Gentiles and not just Jews.

v. 4 – Paul had already been preaching his message for many years when he wrote this, yet he was asking for open doors and clarity of thought and speech. Paul put everything he had into his purpose so that he could fulfill it with excellence and in a way that

brought glory to God. **What is your prayer request today? Is it to be free from some annoying problem, or is it to fulfill your purpose with excellence and grace? Do you know your purpose? Can you describe it simply and succinctly? If not, how will you know what determines being successful for you?**

Day Three

5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

v. 5 – Here Paul urged the Colossians to make the most of every opportunity in their dealings with outsiders. **Toward what end?** That they may lead them to Christ or at least plant seeds that will eventually blossom into gospel fruit. **Are you making the most of your opportunities with “outsiders”?** **Do you have contact with many outsiders?** **How can you create more or do a better job with the ones you have?**

We need wisdom in this outreach so we know what to say and how to conduct ourselves. The early church was passionate about seeing others enter the kingdom of God through evangelism. We need to regain this passion. To make it more personal, *I* need to regain this passion. I think I am friendly toward my neighbors and my every day contacts, but I don't always know how to turn my encounters into chances to talk about the Lord. *Lord, help me with this aspect of my relationship with You and others. Help to share Your goodness with those around me. Amen.*

Is there anyone whom you can share the love of God today?

v. 6 – Salt is used to preserve and flavor food. I need to season my words with salt so they will last after my encounter with that person is over. I also need to make my conversations “taste good,” so that the person is engaged and not repulsed. **Where can I get this salt? Where can I obtain this wisdom when I meet “outsiders”?** One source is the book of Proverbs. Let's see what we can find there to help us with our encounters with others:

- The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out (Proverbs 10:31).
- A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue (Proverbs 11:12).
- Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing (Proverbs 12:18).
- The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit (Proverbs 18:21).
- He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity (Proverbs 21:23).
- He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend (Proverbs 22:11).

What will you do differently, if anything, with what you have learned from these two verses?

Day Four

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

v. 7 – Paul had a team of trusted associates who traveled amongst the churches, just as he did, to strengthen them and report back to him. In this case, Tychicus would be coming to report to the church about Paul. Paul gave Tychicus a sterling recommendation as a dear brother and faithful servant. **What would people say about you in a similar situation?**

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

How do you obtain the kind of reputation that Tychicus had? You get it by being faithful, by going beyond the call of duty to serve the Lord and His people. What's more, you cannot obtain this by sheer effort. God has to help you, for the call to service is a call to die and follow Jesus. I often refer to the price Paul had to pay for his apostolic work; it is always good to be reminded of that price. You can be sure that the other apostles and members of Paul's team paid a similar price, and God may call upon you to do it as well:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children (1 Corinthians 4:9-14).

What price are you willing to pay to have a reputation as a faithful person? Jesus gave some guidelines also for you to follow.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? (Luke 16:10-12).

vs. 8&9 – Paul was dispatching Tychicus, along with Onesimus, another one of the Colossians’ own, to visit the Colossian church. Paul had a plan to stay in contact with the churches and he used Luke, Timothy, Titus and all his team to do so. You may say that today he instead would use the Internet, email and other technology to stay in touch, but I would disagree. There is nothing like a face-to-face meeting to encourage, address needs, answer questions and pray together. Paul knew the value of those personal encounters and he utilized them as often as possible. **Is there anyplace you need to go to have a face-to-face meeting with someone?**

Day Five

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)
11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

v. 10 – Paul was a prisoner when he wrote this letter. Think of that! He was being productive, using the time he had where he was to continue and impact the churches. **Are you using your time effectively or are you blaming non-productivity on the circumstances you find yourself in?** Paul did not do that and you should not do it either.

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and the one with whom Paul had a “falling out” in Acts 13:13 when John Mark left the team. When Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance, Paul refused (see Acts 15:36-41). They must have somehow patched up their differences along the way, for it seems that Mark was close to Paul at this point for greetings to be sent from him. Paul also had sent instructions to the Colossians to welcome Mark if he made a visit to them at any time. It is good to see that peace had been restored to a broken relationship. **Do you any relationships where reconciliation is needed? What are you prepared to do about that?**

v. 11 – Paul had only a few Jews working with him on his Gentile mission. **Why is this?** The Jews were still ambivalent about Gentiles in the Church and about Paul himself. You can read this from the account in Acts 21:17-26 where the apostles told Paul that many in Jerusalem did not like or trust him or his work. There also had been a group of Jewish believers, called the Judaizers, who would follow in Paul’s footsteps and instruct Gentile converts that they had to obey the law of Moses. It is not surprising, therefore, that there were so few Jewish cohorts in Paul’s traveling team. The few he had proved to be of great comfort to him.

Prejudice and bias are insidious evils, for they work in the hearts of men to exclude others of certain ethnic, racial or tribal origins. When I work in Africa, I hear stories of

how people of color still sense a distance and actions with racist overtones from others, even Christians! It is ridiculous to think that the amount of pigment in someone's skin has anything to do with their basic humanity, intelligence or worth. What folly! Any Christian who perpetuates that kind of thinking in their heart is a fool and does not understand the fact that Jesus died for *all* men, which means in God's eyes they are equal.

What can you do to bring harmony among peoples? It isn't enough to simply not be prejudiced. You must actively play a role in undoing the sins of the past that have been perpetrated on people in every culture all over the world. I am not suggesting that you must save the world, but it would be nice if you could make a little piece of it a better place to live.

v. 12 – Paul had two Colossians close to him and his work, which may be why he felt the need to write the letter even though he had never been to Colosse. He felt close to the church because of his associates. Look too at the wonderful testimony that Paul gave about Epaphras. He bore witness that he was always praying for his friends and saints back in his home area. Epaphras' spirituality was obvious to those around him. He was a man of prayer, who even “wrestled” in prayer on behalf of his beloved home church.

When is the last time you wrestled in prayer, if ever? Over what cause were you wrestling?

Note that Epaphras had a goal in mind for which he was praying. He wanted the church to “stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” He wasn't just praying for God to bless this one or to heal that one. **For whom are you praying and what is the end that you have in mind when your prayers are answered for them?**

Day Six

13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

v. 13 – I see that Paul actually sent a report back home about the local workers so that their work when they returned to Colosse would go well. He told the Colossians that Tychicus and Epaphras were not on holiday with him, but were working constantly, actively furthering the kingdom of God and wrestling in prayer for the people back home.

Paul was not an easy man to work with or for. He was demanding, somewhat of a workaholic, had a temper when those around him did not share his insight or passion, and was a perfectionist. He worked by day and preached by night and expected everyone around him to share his same work ethic. Yet Paul was supportive of those who did share his mission and he had a deep love for the people to whom he was sent. (You could not do what Paul did because it was your job.) **What is your passion? What are you willing to lay it all down to do?**

And what would someone say of you if they were writing a letter back to your home church after a prolonged absence on your part? What would they say was your spiritual occupation and condition? Do you work hard for the causes to which you are committed, assuming they are related to the kingdom of God? (I am not referring to something like knitting or stamp collecting.)

v. 14 – Paul certainly had an entourage with him while he was in jail. His jail, however, was probably house arrest, where he had freedom to receive friends and guests while being under guard, perhaps even in chains or handcuffs. Luke and Demas are the seventh and eighth people mentioned in the closing of this letter. Paul was still at the controls in his command center for Kingdom activity, even if he was in chains and under guard.

This verse is where we learn that Luke was a doctor. Luke never referred to his occupation in his writings and neither did Paul. They both chose rather to focus on their Kingdom work and not what made them money. That is a significant fact, for you must learn to do the same. Your purpose isn't necessarily what you do to earn a living. Purpose is what you would do for free if you had all the money in the world. Paul made tents and Luke was a doctor, but neither of those things defined who either man really was. **What is your purpose?** Don't answer with what you do, but with what you are passionate about doing.

v. 15 – Paul had some personal relationships in the region and he asked those reading the letter to greet them on his behalf. One of them was Nympha, obviously a woman who had a church that met in her house. Much has been made recently that meetings in homes is the truly biblical pattern. I don't accept that premise. I think homes were the only place available at that time. It is hypothetical to say that the early Church would not have met in large public venues if they had been available. I believe the church should assemble in small groups but I don't accept that this should be the only meeting expression. **Do you agree with me or not?**

Day Seven

16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. 17 Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord." 18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

v. 16 – Paul expected his letter to be read in the churches of the region. That is the kind of authority he felt he had in the Gentile church world, or at least that he had in Colosse. Paul must have also sent a letter to those in Laodicea, which the Spirit for His own reasons chose not to preserve for us to read today. That is fine with me, for I trust that the same Spirit who inspired the Word is also the One who has preserved the Word for us in its present format. I am not at all concerned about the translations, the supposed errors and lost portions of Scripture. I trust the Lord of the Scriptures to give me all that I need to have and know today.

It was important for the early church to receive these infusions from Paul, the apostolic leader of the day. It is important today for you to be reading and receiving fresh insights and inspiration from the Spirit as well. **What are you currently reading outside of the Bible? What are you listening to?** I hope it isn't that crazy stuff about the end times that is circulating, fables and myths that supposedly have their foundation in Scripture. I am talking about things that can build your faith and teach you more about God and His ways. **What websites or web logs do you visit regularly? Who are your favorite teachers?** I hope not those who spew forth a load of garbage about current events, claiming to have insight into where those current events are predicted in the Bible.

When you read this letter from Paul, it is full of words that exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, encourage the saints and give practical advice on how to apply godly principles to every day living. I fail to see how some moderns who talk about Israel, Iran, the Antichrist and world conspiracies are doing what Paul did. Truthfully, they are not. They are stirring up fear and confusion among God's people, making the kingdom of God seem like a novel as it unfolds. God's work isn't centered around the Antichrist, but the Christ. We are not to be concerned about this war or that rumor of war, but of spreading the gospel to all men and nations. Please don't tell me you are spending your time and money on fairy tales with biblical terminology from supposedly reputable men and ministries, who reap millions of dollars from their fictional labors!

v. 17 – What a powerful admonition this verse holds. Archippus (the ninth person mentioned in this closing) was warned by Paul to finish the work he had received from the Lord. This means: 1) Archippus knew what the work was; 2) Archippus was considering not finishing it; and 3) that the Lord knew this and revealed it to Paul. Archippus must have had it in his power to finish that work for Paul ordered him to “see to it” that it was done and complete. **What work do you need to complete in the Lord? Do you know what your work or assignment is? What hindrances are there from you finishing that work? How can you address and overcome these obstacles?**

v. 18 – Paul must have dictated the letter and closed by signing it in his own handwriting. He asked the readers to remember his chains, perhaps a request for prayer and also a reminder about the seriousness and urgency of their Kingdom work, which had many opponents. I am intrigued by people who can be so laid back when the stakes are people's lives and their eternal destination. Paul had no such laid-back attitude. He was in prison for what he believed, yet that did not stop the work. **What is stopping your work that you need to press through to regain your momentum?** Your work from God is important! Seize the moment and do your thing!

Paul closed with a simple prayer: *Grace be with you. As we finish this study, that is my wish and prayer for you. I pray God's grace on you as you work, labor, live and learn. May the grace of our Lord Jesus help you be as purposeful as Paul and may God expand your influence to ends of the world or at least to the ends of your world. Amen.*