



PAUL'S CLOSING WORDS ON PROPER

CONDUCT AND PERSONAL MATTERS -- CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

Imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote from his heart the words which he would rather have spoken to the Colossians in person. He explained the necessity of being rooted and grounded in true knowledge and never being swayed by the false philosophies and empty deceptions of men. Jesus Christ is true knowledge. There is no need to look any further than Christ, for in Him, all spiritual wisdom dwells. Through Him comes all true understanding. He is preeminent above all things. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him. But above all, He has done what no one else could ever do. He has triumphed over the evil forces of Satan to make spiritually dead sinners alive.

With these wonderful truths, Paul encouraged the hearts of his readers who lived in a world teeming with various religious traditions, pagan philosophies, and intellectual arguments. His message was that Christ, being superior in every way, is the answer to all human need. Why fill your heart and mind with the foolishness of men when God has provided the truth in His own Son? This question is as applicable today as it was nearly two thousand years ago when Paul penned his letter to the Colossians. In 1959, A. W. Tozer wrote a book entitled Born After Midnight. In the chapter, "Only a Few Things Matter," he asks, "Where can a man find security? Can philosophy help him? or psychology? or science? or 'progress'? or atoms or wonder drugs or vitamins? Tozer's answer is, No. Only Christ can help him."

Paul wrote, *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth* (Colossians 3:2). The Christian's place is with Christ. In fact, the Christian's very life is Christ. This being true, the Christian should live for Christ, seeking to please Him in all he says and does and in every human relationship.

This has been the heart of Paul's teaching and exhortation in Colossians. Now he will close his letter and send it off to Colossae entrusted to two faithful and beloved brothers in the Lord, Tychicus and Onesimus. Paul's final admonitions center around gracious Christian conduct, reminders concerning prayer, conduct toward outsiders, and gracious speech. He also forwards greetings from those who are with him in Rome and ends with some final personal instructions.

OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS 4

- I. Christian Conduct - Colossians 4:2-6
- II. Conveyance of Comfort - Colossians 4:7-9 and Philemon 1-25
- III. Greetings from Fellow Workers - Colossians 4:10-14
- IV. Closing - Colossians 4:15-18

I. Christian Conduct - Colossians 4:2-6

Having shared his wealth of spiritual wisdom and true knowledge in Christ and having given practical instruction on walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, Paul gives some final counsel on Christian living in an evil and hostile world.

- A. Continue Earnestly in Prayer - Colossians 4:2-4

The New American Standard Bible reads, *Devote yourselves to prayer*, implying faithfulness and loyalty. The literal Greek meaning of the words is "to be strong towards, endure," or "persevere." Christians are never to be apathetic or lackadaisical in prayer. It is through prayer that we may, *Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16).

1. Pray vigilantly - 4:2

As you pray, do not be careless or half-hearted. Keep your mind alert, watching so you know what to pray for. Pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert *with all perseverance and petition for all the saints* (Ephesians 6:18).

2. Pray thankfully - 4:2

Be thankful that God answers prayer. Do you ever go to God with a need and then forget to thank Him when He answers? Do not regard God's answers lightly. Look around you and notice that God is at work in the world and thank Him. J. B. Lightfoot says that "thankfulness is the crown of all prayer" (Colossians and Philemon). *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God* (Philippians 4:6).

3. Pray for Paul - 4:3-4

Paul asks for prayer for himself and his fellow workers. He specifically asks for the opportunity to preach the gospel and for the clarity of his message.

a. That God would open to us a door - 4:3

Paul had a compulsion to preach the gospel. Even while chained in prison he longed for new opportunities to share the magnificent grace of God which is extended through His Son, Jesus Christ.

b. That I may make it manifest - 4:4

Given the opportunity, Paul also desired clarity in speaking. In his letter to the Ephesians, he had asked prayer for boldness in speaking forth the gospel (Ephesians 6:19), but the meaning of the Greek word here is "to make visible or clear." Both boldness and clarity are needed in presentation of the gospel, and Paul was most likely thinking of both when he used the words, *as I ought to speak*.

c. Application

Do you pray for your church leaders and missionaries, that God may give them opportunities to share the gospel boldly and clearly? Will you ask God to give you opportunity, boldness and clarity in sharing what you have learned in Disciplers?

B. Walk in Wisdom toward Outsiders - Colossians 4:5

As a Christian, all you say and do should be a wise witness to the unredeemed world. Paul refers to the unsaved as *those who are outside* several other times in his epistles: 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; and 1 Timothy 3:7. In those passages, he writes that Christians are not to judge outsiders, but rather are to watch their own lives, aspiring to lead a quiet life, minding their own business, and keeping their hands busy at whatever task God has given them to do. As we labor quietly for the Lord, we are to make the most of every opportunity. The expression in the Greek is literally, "buy up the time." Never pass up a chance to share the love of Christ with a soul which is lost. How do you share Christ's love with those in the world around you? What have you done recently to further the cause of the kingdom of God and bring an outsider into the fold of the family of God?

C. Let Your Speech be Gracious and Salty - Colossians 4:6

In Ephesians 4:29, Paul wrote, *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary*

edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. King Solomon wrote, *The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious* (Ecclesiastes 10:12). When you open your mouth, are the words which come out pleasing and acceptable to the ears of others? Are your words seasoned with salt, tasteful, and sufficiently agreeable to impart God's grace to those who hear?

II. Conveyance of Comfort - Colossians 4:7-9 and Philemon

Paul's letter was to be sent to the Colossians by two couriers, Tychicus and Onesimus. Besides delivering the letter, they would let the church in Colossae know all the news about Paul and fill them in on the details of his situation as a prisoner of Christ Jesus (Philemon 1).

A. Tychicus - Colossians 4:7-8

Paul refers to Tychicus as a *beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord*. He is mentioned in the book of Acts, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Titus as accompanying Paul on a portion of his third missionary journey, as being sent to minister in Ephesus, and possibly being involved in ministry with Titus.

In addition to delivering the letter, Tychicus would comfort and encourage the hearts of the believers. Remember from Chapter 2 that Paul had said he struggled (in prayer) for those believers he had not met personally, that their hearts might be encouraged. Paul entrusted the comfort and encouragement of the Colossian believers to Tychicus.

B. Onesimus - Colossians 4:9 and Philemon

Onesimus traveled with Tychicus to deliver the letter to the Colossians and apparently carried another letter as well, Paul's letter to Philemon. The full story of Onesimus is found in the letter to Philemon which will be discussed in section 2. below.

1. Faithful and beloved brother - 4:9

Onesimus was one Colossian whom Paul had met personally. He had become a faithful and beloved brother to Paul.

2. Runaway slave - Philemon 1-25

From Paul's letter to Philemon, we learn about Onesimus' background and His relationship to Paul. Onesimus was a slave, belonging to Paul's friend Philemon. He had run away to Rome, a common destination for outcasts who desired to get lost in the crowd. Somehow, the providence of God had caused the paths of Paul and Onesimus to cross, and having an

open door to share the gospel, Paul had led Onesimus to know Christ as his Savior and Lord. Onesimus was now Paul's *brother in the Lord*, but even beyond that, he was *faithful and beloved* (Colossians 4:9), useful to Paul (Philemon 11), and a part of Paul's own heart (Philemon 12).

As a believer, Onesimus had become a freeman in Christ (1 Corinthians 7:22), but according to Roman law, he was still a slave. The right thing for a repentant slave to do was return to his master and make restitution for whatever loss Philemon had suffered because of his actions. Philemon 18 alludes to the probability that Onesimus had either stolen from his master or that his running away had in some way caused Philemon financial loss.

Paul sent Onesimus back to Colossae (with a letter of explanation and the moral support of Tychicus) to face his master who had every reason to be angry and to punish Onesimus harshly. In the first century, slaves were considered the dregs of society. They were regarded as chattel and had absolutely no right under the law, being fully under the power of their masters and at their mercy. J. B. Lightfoot points out that the claim of duty demanded a great sacrifice from both Paul and Onesimus. It is clear from his letter to Philemon that Paul desired to keep Onesimus in Rome with him. Surely Onesimus would rather have remained with Paul than go back to Colossae to face probable punishment and possibly even death at the hands of his master. Slaves had been put to death for lesser offenses than Onesimus'.

a. Paul's relationship to Philemon -
Philemon 1-7

Philemon is the only letter which remains of Paul's personal correspondence. It is written to Philemon, a beloved brother and fellow worker (Philemon 1) and also a partner (Philemon 17). Verse 18 hints that Philemon may have come to the Lord through Paul's preaching. Apphia is most likely Philemon's wife, and Archippus is assumed to be their son. In the first century, because there were no church buildings, the body of believers met in individual homes. One such home was that of Philemon and Apphia.

In the opening words of the letter, Paul expressed his gratitude to God for Philemon and his love and faith toward Christ and all the saints. Since Onesimus was now a believer, surely that love would extend to him. Paul's prayer in verse 6 is that the knowledge or recognition of the good which is in him because of Jesus Christ will cause Philemon to share his faith actively and powerfully, performing in accordance with the faith which is in him. Perhaps this was Paul's way of telling Philemon that he is praying that he will

do what is right in regards to his slave Onesimus. To handle the situation in a Godly manner would surely be a profound witness even beyond the community of believers.

b. Paul's purpose in writing - Philemon
8 -20

Onesimus could not be sent back to face Philemon all alone. Both the letter to Philemon and the companionship of Tychicus were Paul's efforts at conciliation. The heart of the letter is a beautiful example of gentle persuasion. Paul's appeal to Philemon was based on love. He could have ordered Philemon to do the right thing knowing that Philemon would obey, but he appealed in love, as an aged apostle in chains. He wanted Philemon to respond out of love, *That your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will* (Philemon 14).

Paul's desire was for Philemon to forgive Onesimus and free him, although he did not say so directly. He left it up to Philemon to determine the right thing to do and simply asked him to, *receive him as you would me* (Philemon 17). Onesimus had left as a slave, but by God's grace, he had returned as much more than a slave. He was now a beloved brother in Christ and should be received in a manner of consideration and love befitting Christian brothers. Paul knew that Philemon would do above and beyond what he had asked. His confidence in Philemon would be confirmed (Philemon 21) and his heart refreshed in the Lord (Philemon 20).

As far as restitution for the wrong Onesimus had done, or any money he may have owed Philemon, Paul would repay (Philemon 19). By writing his intentions and signing in his own hand, he placed himself under legal obligation to fulfill this promise. Paul's small act of kindness is a plain picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for all believers. Onesimus was in debt to Philemon, but Paul, who was not involved in any way with Onesimus' wrongdoing, took responsibility for payment of the debt, freeing Onesimus from his obligation. In the same way, all people, as sinners, are in debt to God, but Christ, who is sinless and separate from sinners, took our sins upon Himself and paid the price to set us free (Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29; Hebrews 7:25-28; 1 John 3:5). Will you thank God for the freedom and forgiveness with which you have been blessed in Christ? If you have not yet put your faith in God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will you humbly thank Him now for all He has done for you, confess your sin, and begin to gratefully enjoy your freedom in Christ?

c. Practical application

Paul's letter to Philemon is a beautiful reminder of our

responsibilities in Christian brotherhood. We are called to love and forgive one another, not out of compulsion but of our own free will. For love's sake, we are to stress what we share in common as believers and overlook our differences. We are all one in Christ (Colossians 3:11). *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you* (Ephesians 4:32).

III. Greetings from Fellow Workers - Colossians 4:10-14

This next portion of Colossians conveys greetings to the Colossian church from those who were with Paul in Rome.

A. Those Who are of the Circumcision - Colossians 4:10-11

Those who are *of the circumcision* refers to Paul's fellow-workers who were Jews by birth. They were a comfort and an encouragement to Paul in his imprisonment. There were three whom Paul mentioned as sending their greetings to Colossae: Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus, also called Justus.

1. Aristarchus - 4:10a

Paul refers to Aristarchus as his *fellow prisoner*, meaning either that he attended Paul in prison or that he was confined along with Paul for preaching the Gospel. Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica. He had accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey and on his voyage as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2).

2. Mark, Barnabas' cousin - 4:10b

Also called John or John Mark, he had started out with Paul on his first missionary journey but he turned around and went back to Jerusalem before the mission was completed (Acts 12:25 and 13:13). This had caused a breach in his relationship with Paul (Acts 15:37-38), but the two were obviously reconciled by the time Paul wrote Colossians and Philemon (Philemon 24). Mark is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11, written near the end of Paul's life, as being useful to him in ministry.

3. Jesus who is called Justus - 4:11

This man is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, and nothing else is known about him.

B. Epaphras - Colossians 4:12-13

1. A servant of Christ from Colossae - 4:12a

From Colossians 1:6-7, we know that Epaphras

was the one who had first shared the gospel with the Colossians. He was from Colossae himself (*one of you*, Colossians 4:12). Paul describes him as a *bondservant of Christ*. The Greek word for servant, "doulos," can also be translated "bondservant," as it usually signifies subjection, with the idea of bondage. It is a term which Paul also used to describe himself (Romans 1:1). The only other person he so designated was Timothy (Philippians 1:1). This may denote that Paul held a special esteem for Epaphras.

2. A prayer warrior - 4:12b

Not only did Epaphras send greetings to his flock in Colossae, he labored fervently for them in his prayers. He prayed that they would *stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*. This is similar to Paul's goal for all to whom he ministered: *to present every man perfect in Christ* (Colossians 1:28).

3. A zealous laborer for the churches - 4:13

Paul attested to Epaphras' zeal and hard work for the Christians who lived in and around his home, in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul obviously held Epaphras in high regard.

C. Luke - Colossians 4:14a

From Colossians 4:10-11, (See III, A.) it is assumed that Luke was a Gentile. Luke is the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. He was also a physician and a devoted friend to Paul. In the Book of Acts, we learn that Luke traveled with Paul on portions of his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16:10 and Acts 20:6); he traveled with Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 21); he also attended him on the journey from Jerusalem to imprisonment in Rome (Acts 27). In 2 Timothy, written during his second and final imprisonment, Paul wrote that Luke was the only one with him (2 Timothy 4:11).

D. Demas - Colossians 4:14b

By the time of Paul's second imprisonment, Demas had deserted him. The reason Paul gives is that Demas *loved this present world* (2 Timothy 4:10), a sad commentary.

IV. Closing- Colossians 4: 15-18

A. Concerning Laodicea - Colossians 4:15-16

Paul asked the Colossians to extend his greetings to the church in Laodicea, especially Nymphas (or Nympha) in whose house the small congregation met. His letter was to be sent on to them when the Colossian church finished reading it.

Paul had also written a letter to Laodicea. He commends the Colossians to read that letter as well. Some scholars believe that Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the other letter of which Paul spoke. Ephesians may have been a circular letter which was meant to be passed around to the various churches in Asia Minor.

B. Concerning Archippus - Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 2

Archippus was most likely the son of Philemon. He had a special ministry in the church, either at Laodicea or in Colossae. Paul sends an exhortation to him through the Colossian church to fulfill the ministry he had received from the Lord. Any ministry begun in the Lord should be seen through to completion.

C. Closing and Signature - Colossians 4:18

Paul had evidently dictated the letter to a secretary, but the closing request and his signature were in his own hand. He asked that the Colossian Christians *remember my chains*. This was most likely not so much to gain their sympathy as to secure their obedience to what he had written.

As in all his letters, Paul closes with grace. Grace was the heart of Paul's message. The power of the gospel is by grace, and the power for Christian living comes by grace. Every believer is indebted to and dependent upon grace. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith (Ephesians 2:8) and not through any human works, tradition or philosophy taught by false teachers. No wonder Paul closes with the words, *Grace be with you*. All is grace.

Applications

1. Paul and his fellow workers took their Christian ministries very seriously, pressing on in spreading the gospel and upholding the body of Christ regardless of their own difficulties. How serious are you about fulfilling the ministry you have received from the Lord? Will you pray that you might see any work you have begun through to completion?
2. Do you pray for the ministries of others? What specific person and ministry will you commit to pray for?
3. How is your life and your speech a witness to unbelievers?
4. Is there someone whom you need to forgive as Philemon needed to forgive Onesimus? Will you respond to the love of Christ working in you and forgive and free both yourself and the other person from the bitterness which defiles the relationship? See hebrews 12:14-15.
5. Is there someone you can encourage in the Lord as Paul sought to encourage the Colossians? With whom will you share the knowledge of the greatness of Christ and the encouragement to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?