

Paul's final Instructions for the Christian Life

Message - Colossians 4:2-18

Introduction

- **Paul has been exhorting the church to resemble Jesus (3:12-17).** Paul exhorted the Colossians, in whatever specific roles they had in life - the husbands, wives, children, fathers, even slaves and masters to resemble Jesus in their individual lives, seen first in their homes. (3:18-4:1)
- Now he concludes his letter with some final instructions to this new church. A church he has not visited, filled with people he has not met. However, I believe this theme to 'resemble Jesus' continues as he finishes his letter to the church.
- When I leave the house, right before I walk out the door to the garage and get in my car, **Charlotte always says - 'Be careful'**. She says this almost every time I leave, and has now for over 48 years. Why does she do that? She knows that I am careful when I drive. I have only had one accident, which wasn't my fault, and I have been driving for 53 over years. She says this because she loves me. The last thing she is communicating to me is something she wants me to remember. All that she says to me is important. But the last thing before I leave is what she is wanting to ensure I keep in the forefront of my mind as I walk out into the day.
- I believe Paul is doing the same thing as he closes out this letter to the Colossians. He is leaving them with a few important instructions. Let's read this last section of the letter with that in mind... the various instructions that he wants them to remember, to have on the **fore front of their minds**, as they walk away from hearing this letter.
- In his last instructions to the Colossians, Paul tells the church how to 'resemble Jesus' in **three aspects of the Christian walk** that are common to all of us - Our personal walk with God, our interaction with those outside of the church, and finally, our walk together in Christian community. In essence, Paul is saying to them as they walk out the door - **Church... remember to pray, church... remember to share the gospel, and church...remember to appreciate each other.**
- **Read the passage / pray**

I. Remember to Pray (2-4)

(2a) *Continue steadfastly in prayer...*

- He begins with their personal relationships with God, and starts with prayer. Do they pray? Yes, he encourages them to *continue steadfastly* in prayer, not to begin to pray. Why? Because Paul is addressing the Colossian church, the believers, and believers pray. If you are saved, then you pray. Maybe not regularly, maybe not lengthy prayers, but a believer prays.
- In mentioning this here at the end of the letter I believe that Paul is reminding them that prayer is essential, for them and for their growth in Christ. He is instructing them to see their prayer as a priority, a discipline that remains constant in their lives. Prayer is that important.
- *Continue steadfastly in prayer...or 'remain constant in prayer', or, 'faithful in prayer', or even to 'be devoted' to prayer.* Those all point to the meaning of the text. This is one of 6 times this same expression is used referring to prayer is used.
 - Acts 1:14 - (After the ascension of Jesus while the disciples were waiting in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Spirit), *'These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer...'*
 - Acts 2:42 – *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.'*
 - Romans 12:12 – *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be devoted in prayer.'*
- It is describing prayer as something in our lives that is an on-going commitment and experience. To continue steadfastly with something, or to continually devote yourself to something means that you are not haphazard in what you do. It means you take steps to see that it is something you continue, that it is part of your regular life.
- If you are like me, I continue steadfastly with some obvious things, like eating. Rarely a day goes by, or even a mealtime goes by unnoticed. I make time to eat, I find time for food. In essence you could say that I continue steadfastly with mealtimes, or even that I am continually devoted to eating.

- Eating is an easy example because we see immediate benefit from it. When we eat, we satisfy our hunger. We see a direct connection between our need and having that need satisfied.
- Prayer is not always that way. We are well aware of our needs - our trials, our challenges, our physical needs, and so were the Colossians. However, we cannot connect such a direct line between our needs and our answered prayer. When that connection gets too strained or too distant, we can get discouraged and our prayer can be described as - less than '*continuing steadfastly*'.
- I agree with the author Sam Storm who said, 'The easiest thing about prayer is quitting.' I think the apostle Paul would agree, and possibly that is why he begins here with an encouragement for them to *continue steadfastly*, or to be devoted, in prayer. It is far too easy to quit. Why do we quit? Well... I believe it is because we weigh our experience with prayer over God's truth and promises about prayer.
 - ...become discouraged not seeing specific answers to prayer... so we quit
 - ...begin to feel that we talk but no one seems to be listening... so we quit
 - ...think that our prayers are ineffective, seeing few answers... so we quit
 - ...feel that when we do pray, our prayers seem redundant ... so we quit.
- What do all of those reasons have in common? The reasons for quitting are typically attached how we feel about what our prayers are really accomplishing. We too often do not believe what God says about prayer more than what we experience in prayer, so we find it easy to quit. Let's look at what God says about prayer:
 - God says - Hebrews 4:14-16 -
 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

- God says - 1Peter 3:12 -
 - *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.*
- God says - Matthew 6:8b -
 - *...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*
- God says - Romans 8:34 -
 - *Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*
- It is said that at the end of his life Winston Churchill was asked to give a speech at a 'Prize Day' at his old school. When the moment came he slowly walked to the microphone and said his most famous 7-word speech – “Never, never, never, never, never, give up.” Then he sat down.
- This is what Paul is telling us, to never give up. Where ever we are in our prayer lives, we are to continue, continue steadfastly, and to never give up praying. God will meet us in our trying.
 - “It is not possible that God should refuse to hear prayer. It is possible for him to bid the sun standstill, and the moon to stay her monthly march, it is possible for him to bid the waves freeze in the sea, possible for him to quench the light of the stars in eternal darkness, but it is not possible for him to refuse to hear prayer which is based upon his promise and offered in faith. He can reverse nature, but he cannot reverse his own nature, and he must do this before he can forbear to hear and answer prayer.”
Charles Spurgeon
- Paul does not simply encourage us to pray but helps us with how to pray, and begins with *...being watchful in it...*

(2b) ... *Being watchful in it...*

- Paul now includes instruction about the content of our prayers. Paul is encouraging the Colossians to be '*watchful*'. The meaning of this word and its use goes beyond the view of simply not drifting off to daydreaming, or going to sleep during our prayers. Which is something we can all identify with, and have experienced. However, being watchful in it certainly does have alertness in mind.

It reminds us of when Jesus asked Peter, James and John to pray with him in the Garden before his arrest in Matthew 26:41, but feel asleep.

- *Being watchful* also an eternal dimension to it, a realization that we are praying to the almighty creator, and anticipating the return of the King. It helps to remind us that we are not home, while we are here on earth. This world is not our home, heaven is our home. Prayer is a constant reminder that we are citizens of heaven and our kingdom is coming.
- Prayer with this watchful attention and awareness helps us to realize that we are speaking to the true Ruler of all things. This helps us to all see a greater power and effect to our prayer. We can be overwhelmed with the world around us... the overall movement of our society away from God, as we see in the daily news coverage, or the eroding condition of our religious liberties seen in our society, or the uncertainty of the stock market in an election year. Prayer takes our focus off of today's trials and the world around us, and helps us look into the face of Jesus.
- When we pray it is a reminder of who we are, children of God, purchased by the blood of Christ, who will live with him for all of eternity. This brings to us perspective on our lives and faith for our lives and situations. This can help our prayer to focus beyond today and into the reality of our eternal hope. That focus encourages our soul!!
 - Prayer is like the GPS in our phones. A system connected to satellites far above the earth that gives a signal to see where you are in relation to where you want to go. In essence it can guide you there. Prayer can function in a similar way for the Christian. Communication with God, your Father that gives you a proper perspective of where you are and where you are headed.
- Then Paul adds to *being watchful in it... with thanksgiving...*

(2c) ...*With thanksgiving...*

- Paul did not want them to walk away from hearing this letter with a list of do's and don'ts to check off when they walked out the door. He wanted them to see what living the Christian life looks like, yes. He wanted them to have lives that resemble Jesus, yes. Be he also wanted to ensure that they continue to see the power to do these things is found in their dependence upon God.

- Paul is showing this dependence is practically seen and experienced in personal prayer. Thanksgiving helps us to look to God and see what he has done, to build faith for what he is going to do.
 - “Thanksgiving is an admission of dependence.” Jerry Bridges
- This is the 7th time in the letter that they are directed to give thanks. Three of the 7 instances are connected to prayer.
 - 1:3 - *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...*
 - 1:12 - *...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*
- What does gratitude do for us? It changes our focus, we look and see something beyond our need and onto things God has done for us, and things about God that are true. It also helps us to see our dependence upon God for everything we do.
- Remember, the one who is calling us to prayer is the one who is hearing our prayers. The reality is that He is listening and answering as we pray. We can be thankful that God listens to us, hears us, and is powerful enough to accomplish anything and everything that we need.
 - Ephesians 3:20 - *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...*
- Paul continues to talk about prayer in verse 3, but he is asking for their prayer for Him.

(3) At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison...

- His request is for intercessory prayer from the Colossian church for Himself and for the mission. Paul sees prayer as an essential tool to build the kingdom and asks this small new church to pray for him. The very church he is instructing on how to live, and how to pray, is the people he is soliciting their prayers on his behalf.

- How mature do you need to be for your prayers to be effective? You only need to be a believer and your prayers are powerful enough to help build a kingdom that cannot be shaken.
- Also, I believe he asks the Colossians to pray for him so that they can be a part of what God is doing beyond their own community, seeing more of what God is doing in the world that they may be apart together in prayer, and have even more to be thankful for.
 - John Piper - “What this means is that God appoints prayer as the means of finishing a mission that he has promised will certainly be finished. Therefore, we pray, not because the outcome is uncertain, but because God has promised and cannot fail. Our prayers are the means God has appointed to do what he most certainly will do – finish the great commission and establish his kingdom.”

... (4) that I should make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

- Then Paul shows his own personal dependence on prayer, and the prayers of the church for him. He asks to make clear the message, a message that he has given more times than can be counted over his ministry years.
- However, he is not dependent upon himself, or his experience, or his history, but on God through prayer. Paul saw the power in prayer.... And so should we!

II. Remember to share the gospel (5-6)

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. **6** Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

- Paul is encouraging the Colossian Christians to have an eye toward those unbelievers outside of the church community in Colossae. He is challenging them to use wisdom yes, but to make the best use of their time in reaching out with the gospel. A good interpretation could be to ‘*snap up every opportunity that comes.*’

- That openness is one that Paul wants them to have toward outsiders. This could be challenging because in the early church, reaching out to the world would not always be something safe to do due to persecution from the pagan world and also the Jewish community. However, Paul is encouraging them to remember the lost. Remember to reach out with the gospel in a way that *snaps up every opportunity that comes*.
- We can take to heart the direction to *'snap up every opportunity that comes'*, and not only rely on church programs or ministries, or take the attitude of letting those evangelists among us do this. This is a call to all of us to reach the lost with the gospel.
- He also encourages them to share in a way that is *seasoned with salt*. In the ancient world, salt was used in preserving foods, or improving the taste of foods. All would know of the positive effect of salt, how it helps. So, to have speech in their interaction with the Gentiles in their lives that would hear the gospel message and be drawn to Christ. Their speech should be like it was *seasoned with salt*. I think that the old adage fits here nicely - '
 - You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, but you can feed him salt, and make him thirsty!' We are to share about our Jesus in such a way that makes people thirsty for the fountain of life found only in Him.
 - Psalm 34:8 - *'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!*
- May we all take a fresh look during this holiday season to *'snap up every opportunity'* that comes our way, and share graciously, making people thirsty for the only water that satisfies!

III. Remember to appreciate each other (7-18)

- He then addresses 10 different people as he closes the letter. His partnership in the gospel is on display for us. He is encouraging these various people as he describes their service. Paul is showing appreciation for those he is serving beside.
- He is expressing gratitude for them as he is acknowledging their service. His love for them seems clear. He is helping this new church to see the importance of noticing where others are ‘resembling Jesus’ in how they live, and encouraging them.
- However, of the list he could have labeled 2 as prisoners, 1 as a slave and 1 as a deserter. That is what the world would see, but Paul labeled them as beloved brothers, faithful ministers, a comfort to Paul. Paul first saw in these people the work of Christ and that was his focus, and the source of his encouragement:
- These two men brought the letter
 - ***Tychicus*** - *a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.*
 - Most likely delivered the Ephesian and Colossian letters to the respective churches.
 - ***Onesimus***- *our faithful and beloved brother,*
 - A salve as seen in the book of Philemon
 - By describing him as “the faithful and beloved brother” Paul gives him the same predicates as Tychicus and Epaphras and this suggests that Onesimus the slave is to receive the same warm greeting from the Colossian church that would be extended to any visiting Christian.¹
- Three Jewish men supporting Paul
 - ***Aristarchus, Mark, Justus.*** - *the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.*
 - Aristarchus - From Thessalonica, traveler with Paul, imprisoned together.

¹ O’Brien, P. T. (1982). [*Colossians, Philemon*](#) (Vol. 44, p. 248). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

- Mark - *the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions - if he comes to you welcome him.)*
 - Justus - one of the three Jews giving comfort to Paul
- The founder of the church and in prison with Paul, three Gentile men
 - **Epaphras** - *a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.*
 - An evangelist who brought the gospel to Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis
 - **Luke** - *the beloved physician, greets you*
 - Wrote Luke and Acts
 - **Demas** - *Greets you*
 - 2 Timothy 4:10 - *For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.*
- The woman who has the church meeting in her home
 - **Nympha** - *and the church in her house. (Hospitality)*
 - She probably had the church in Laodicea meeting in her house, located about 10 miles to the west of Colossae. She was probably a widow.
- A member of the Colossian church
 - **Archippus** - *“See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”*
 - The only one to receive a personal exhortation from Paul. He is also mentioned in Philemon and described as ‘our fellow soldier’.
- Paul would first see and acknowledge the work of Christ in a Christian’s life which can be our first thought for one another as well. It creates the genuine appreciation for each other as we serve together in his kingdom.
- Finally, Paul closes out his letter...*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.*
- Paul wants them to know, without a doubt, that he is the author of the letter. He then asks for them to remember his chains. Interestingly enough he does not ask for them to pray for him to be released from prison but to *remember his chains*, to pray for his situation, his imprisonment.

- He then closes with the intentional benediction - '*Grace be with you*'. Paul knows that God's grace will sustain the Colossian community, for it is by grace alone that they will stand.² Grace is what we need in order to do what God calls us to do. We need his grace, Paul's final note is for that grace to be ours, to be experienced in our lives. He leaves them with that focus.
- However, to resemble Jesus begins by first looking to Jesus and receiving his grace. Only in his grace can we do these things. All throughout the letter he has continually directed the Colossians to first look to Christ, for the grace to change, before directing them to any action. He ends the letter with that reminder that this power to change comes from looking to Christ and His grace. Paul ends his letter saying - '*Grace be with you*'.
- *Grace be with you*
 - With you to walk out the Christian life
 - With you to '*Put to death what is earthly in you*'
 - With you to '*Put on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience.*
 - With you to '*bear with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other.*'
 - With you husbands '*to love their wives*'
 - With you wives to '*submit to their husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*'
 - With you children to '*obey their parents*'
 - With you as you Look to *continue steadfastly in prayer*
 - With you as you Look to *share the gospel*
 - With you as you Look to *appreciate each other*
- So, walk out today with 'looking to Jesus' on the forefront of your mind. His grace is available to every believer because of his finished work on the Cross and the empty tomb.
- If you are not a believer, please know that God can give his grace to you. It comes through believing in Jesus Christ, by believing that he is the Son of God, that he lived a sinless life, that he died on the cross for your sins, and that he rose from the dead and is ruling in heaven. Trust in Christ for your salvation and receive his grace.

² O'Brien, P. T. (1982). [*Colossians, Philemon*](#) (Vol. 44, p. 260). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.