

**Colossians 3:18-4:18**  
**September 22, 2024**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Ladies, as a woman, what would you say if a friend told you submitting to your husband means that you are inferior to him? [Let the women engage]

Q: Gentlemen, as a man, what would you say to someone who attacks this idea as being antiquated and demeaning to women? [Let the men engage]

**Transition:** Paul is going to weigh in on these questions. He provides specific instructions to believers as they deal with the most important and intimate relationships they have, starting in the home. He deals with three Christ honoring relationships: husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employee. There's a lot to learn! Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**Rules for Christian Households**

<sup>18</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

<sup>19</sup> Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

<sup>20</sup> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

<sup>22</sup> Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, <sup>24</sup> since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. <sup>25</sup> Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

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

*Further Instructions*

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

*Final Greetings*

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

<sup>10</sup> 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.) <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.”

<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

A husband who truly loves his wife will not behave harshly or try to throw his weight around in the home. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor. 13:4–5, NIV).

A wife really has little difficulty submitting to a husband who loves her. She knows he seeks the very best for her, and that he will not do anything to harm her. The husband's love for his wife is seen in his sacrifice for her, and the wife's love for her husband is seen in her submission to him. Where there are sacrifice and submission in an atmosphere of love, you will find a happy home.

Where do we get the power to love and to submit? From the Lord. If we are wearing the “grace clothes” described earlier (Col. 3:5–14), and if we have our hearts filled with the peace of Christ and the Word of Christ, then we will contribute to the joy and harmony of the home. If we live to please Christ first, others second, and ourselves last, we will build strong marriages and spiritual homes.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 141-154)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

Faith in Jesus Christ not only changes individuals; it also changes homes. In this section, Paul addressed himself to family members: husbands and wives, children, and household servants. It seems clear that these persons being addressed were believers since the apostle appealed to all of them to live to please Jesus Christ.

Something is radically wrong with homes today. The last report I saw indicated that in America there are now more broken homes than ever. Single-parent families are on the increase. Over half of all mothers are now working outside the home, and many of them have small children. The average American child from six to sixteen watches from twenty to twenty-four hours of television each week and is greatly influenced by what he sees. The “battered child” syndrome continues to increase, with from 2 to 4 million cases being reported annually, and many not reported at all.

The first institution God founded on earth was the home (Gen. 2:18–25; Matt. 19:1–6). As goes the home, so goes society and the nation. The breakdown of the home is a sign of the end times (2 Tim. 3:1–5). Centuries ago Confucius said, “The strength of a nation is derived from the integrity of its homes.” One of the greatest things we can do as individuals is help to build godly Christian homes. Paul addressed the various members of the family and pointed out the factors that make for a strong and godly home.

### **Husbands and Wives: Love and Submission (Col. 3:18–19)**

Paul did not address the wives first because they were the neediest! The Gospel radically changed the position of women in the Roman world. It gave them a new freedom and stature that some of them were unable to handle, and for this reason Paul admonished them (similar admonitions are found in Eph. 5:18ff and 1 Peter 3:1ff).

We must not think of *submission* as “slavery” or “subjugation.” The word comes from the military vocabulary and simply means “to arrange under rank.” The fact that one soldier is a private and another is a colonel does not mean that one man is necessarily *better* than the other. It only means that they have different ranks.

God does all things “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). If He did not have a chain of command in society, we would have chaos. The fact that the woman is to submit to her husband does not suggest that the man is better than the woman. It only means that the man has the responsibility of headship and leadership in the home.

Headship is not dictatorship or lordship. It is loving leadership. In fact, both the husband and the wife must be submitted to the *Lord* and to *each other* (Eph. 5:21). It is a mutual respect under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

True spiritual submission is the secret of growth and fulfillment. When a Christian woman is submitted to the Lord and to her own husband, she experiences a release and fulfillment that she can have in no other way. This mutual love and submission creates an atmosphere of growth in the home that enables both the husband and the wife to become all that God wants them to be.

The fact that the Christian wife is “in the Lord” is not an excuse for selfish independence. Just the opposite is true, for her salvation makes it important that she obey the Word and submit

to her husband. While it is true that in Jesus Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), it is also true that joyful submission is an evidence that the wife belongs to Jesus Christ.

However, the husband has the responsibility of loving his wife; and the word for “love” used here is *agape*—the sacrificing, serving love that Christ shares with His church. A marriage may begin with normal, human, romantic love, but it must grow deeper into the spiritual *agape* love that comes only from God. In the parallel passage (Eph. 5:18ff), Paul made it clear that the husband must love his wife “even as Christ loved the church.” Jesus Christ gave His all for the church! He willingly died for us! The measure of a man’s love for his wife is not seen only in gifts or words, but in acts of sacrifice and concern for her happiness and welfare.

Paul added a special word of warning for the husbands: “And be not bitter against them” (Col. 3:19). Husbands must be careful not to harbor ill will toward their wives because of something they did or did not do. A “root of bitterness” in a home can poison the marriage relationship and give Satan a foothold (Eph. 4:31; Heb. 12:15). The Christian husband and wife must be open and honest with each other and not hide their feelings or lie to one another. “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) is a good way to solve family differences. “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” is a wise policy to follow if you want to have a happy home (Eph. 4:26).

A husband who truly loves his wife will not behave harshly or try to throw his weight around in the home. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor. 13:4–5, NIV).

A wife really has little difficulty submitting to a husband who loves her. She knows he seeks the very best for her, and that he will not do anything to harm her. The husband’s love for his wife is seen in his sacrifice for her, and the wife’s love for her husband is seen in her submission to him. Where there are sacrifice and submission in an atmosphere of love, you will find a happy home.

A happy marriage does not come automatically; it is something that must be worked at all the time. As we walk with Christ in submission to Him, we have no problem submitting to one another and seeking to serve one another. But where there is selfishness, there will be conflict and division. If there is bitterness in the heart, there will eventually be trouble in the home.

Where do we get the power to love and to submit? From the Lord. If we are wearing the “grace clothes” described earlier (Col. 3:5–14), and if we have our hearts filled with the peace of Christ and the Word of Christ, then we will contribute to the joy and harmony of the home. If we live to please Christ first, others second, and ourselves last, we will build strong marriages and spiritual homes.

### **Parents and Children: Encouragement and Obedience (Col. 3:20–21)**

There were children in these Christian homes, and Paul addressed part of his letter to them. The normal result of marriage is the bearing of children, and fortunate are those children who are born into Christian homes where there is love and submission. “Be fruitful and multiply” was God’s order to our first parents (Gen. 1:28), and this order was given before man sinned. The marriage relationship and the bearing of children are not sinful; rather, they are part of God’s mandate to man. In the begetting and bearing of children, the husband and wife share in the creative activity of God.

A great deal is being said about the rights of children, and they *do* have rights. One of them is the right to be born. Another is the right to be born into a dedicated Christian home where they

will be raised in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). They have the right to have godly parents who will teach them the Word of God and discipline them in love.

John H. Starkey was a violent British criminal. He murdered his own wife, then was convicted for the crime and executed. The officials asked General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, to conduct Starkey’s funeral. Booth faced as ugly and mean a crowd as he had ever seen in his life, but his first words stopped them and held them: “John H. Starkey never had a praying mother!”

Children have rights, but they also have responsibilities; and their foremost responsibility is to obey. They are to obey “in all things” and not simply in those things that please them. Will their parents ever ask them to do something that is wrong? Not if the parents are submitted to the Lord and to one another, and not if they love each other and their children.

The child who does not learn to obey his parents is not likely to grow up obeying *any* authority. He will defy his teachers, the police, his employers, and anyone else who tries to exercise authority over him. The breakdown in authority in our society reflects the breakdown of authority in the home.

For the most part, children do not *create* problems; they *reveal* them. Parents who cannot discipline themselves cannot discipline their children. If a father and mother are not *under* authority themselves, they cannot *exercise* authority over others. It is only as parents submit to each other and to the Lord that they can exercise properly balanced spiritual and physical authority over their children.

The *measure* of the child’s obedience is “all things”; and the *motive* is to please the Lord. It is possible to please the parents and not please the Lord, if the parents are not yielded to the Lord. The family that lives in an atmosphere of love and truth, that reads the Word of God, and that prays together will have an easier time discovering God’s will and pleasing the Lord.

The word *fathers* in Colossians 3:21 could be translated “parents,” as it is in Hebrews 11:23. Paul made it clear that parents must make it as easy as possible for children to obey. “Provoke not your children” (Col. 3:21) is a commandment to parents, and how often it is disobeyed! Too often, parents automatically say *no* when their children ask for something, when the parents should listen carefully and evaluate each request. Parents often change their minds and create problems for their children, sometimes by swinging from extreme permissiveness to extreme legalism.

Fathers and mothers should encourage their children, not discourage them. One of the most important things parents can do is spend time with their children. A survey in one town indicated that fathers spent only thirty-seven seconds a day with their small sons! It is an encouragement for children to know that their parents, as busy as they are, take time—*make* time—to be with them.

Parents also need to listen and be patient as their children talk to them. A listening ear and a loving heart always go together. “You took time to have me,” a child said to her father, “but you won’t take time to listen to me!” What an indictment!

Life is not easy for children, especially Christian children. Their problems might seem small to us, but they are quite large to them! Christian parents must listen carefully, share the feelings and frustrations of their children, pray with them, and seek to encourage them. Home ought to be the happiest and best place in all the world!

Discouraged children are fair prey for Satan and the world. When a child does not get “ego-strength” at home, he will seek it elsewhere. It is a pity that some Christian parents do not help their children develop their personalities, their gifts, and their skills. It is even worse when

Christian parents compare one child with another and thereby set up unnecessary competition in the home.

Parents sometimes use their children as weapons for fighting against each other. Father will forbid Junior from doing something, but Mother will veto that order and give her approval. The poor child is caught between his parents, and before long he learns how to play both ends against the middle. The result is moral and spiritual tragedy.

If a home is truly Christian, it is a place of encouragement. In such a home, the child finds refuge from battles, and yet strength to fight the battles and carry the burdens of growing maturity. He finds a loving heart, a watching eye, a listening ear, and a helping hand. He does not want any other place—home meets his needs. In this kind of a home, it is natural for the child to trust Christ and want to live for Him.

### **Masters and Servants: Honesty and Devotion (Col. 3:22–4:1)**

Slavery was an established institution in Paul's day. There were 60 million of them, and many of them were well-educated people who carried great responsibilities in the homes of the wealthy. In many homes, the slaves helped to educate and discipline the children.

Why didn't the church of that day openly oppose slavery and seek to destroy it? For one thing, the church was a minority group that had no political power to change an institution that was built into the social order. Paul was careful to instruct Christian slaves to secure their freedom if they could (1 Cor. 7:21); but he did not advocate rebellion or the overthrow of the existing order.

Something should be noted: the purpose of the early church was to spread the Gospel and win souls, not to get involved in social action. Had the first Christians been branded as an antigovernment sect, they would have been greatly hindered in their soul-winning and their church expansion. While it is good and right for Christians to get involved in the promotion of honesty and morality in government and society, this concern must never replace the mandate to go into all the world and preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15).

You will remember that the Book of Colossians was one of three letters that came from Paul's Roman imprisonment; the other two were Ephesians and Philemon. Read Paul's little letter to Philemon and see his attitude toward slavery. Paul did not advise Philemon to treat his runaway slave severely, but to receive him as a brother even though he was still a slave. In fact, Onesimus, the slave, was one of the men who carried this letter to Colossae! (Col. 4:9)

A Christian servant owed complete obedience to his master as a ministry to the Lord. If a Christian servant had a believing master, that servant was not to take advantage of his master because they were brothers in the Lord. If anything, the servant strived to do a better job because he was a Christian. He showed singleness of heart and gave his full devotion to his master. His work was done heartily, not grudgingly, and as to the Lord and not to men. "Ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:24).

Single hearts and sincere hearts were necessary for Christian servants to please God and serve their masters acceptably. These instructions emphasized the *positive* side of obedience. Servants were to obey to please God, not just to avoid punishment. Even if the master did not commend them, they would have their reward from the Lord. In the same manner, if they disobeyed, the Lord would deal with them even if their master did not. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; James 2:1, 9).

In our society we do not have slaves. But these principles apply to any kind of honest employment. A Christian worker ought to be the best worker on the job. He ought to obey orders

and not argue. He ought to serve Christ and not the boss only, and he ought to work whether anybody is watching or not. If he follows these principles, he will receive his reward from Christ even if his earthly master (his boss) does not recognize him or reward him.

I have a friend who, years ago, was fired from his job for working too hard. He was earning money to go to college, and he wanted to give the employer a good day's work each day. The trouble was, his zeal was showing up the laziness of some of the other employees—and they started fighting back. One of them falsely accused my friend of something, and he was fired. He lost his job but he kept his character, and the Lord rewarded him.

In today's complex, competitive world, it is sometimes difficult for a Christian to obey God and hold his job, or get a promotion. But he must obey God just the same and trust Him for what he needs. Unsaved fellow employees may take advantage of the Christian worker, but perhaps this can be an opportunity for the Christian to witness and back up his witness with his life. It is far more important to win a lost soul than to make a few extra dollars.

Just as the husbands and wives and parents and children have mutual and reciprocal responsibilities, so do masters and servants. Paul admonished the Christian masters to treat their servants with fairness and honesty. This would be a new idea to Roman masters because they considered their slaves as "things," and not people. Masters had almost total control over their slaves and could do with them whatever they pleased. Few unsaved Roman masters ever thought of treating their slaves with fairness, for slaves deserved nothing.

The Gospel did not immediately destroy slavery, but it did gradually change the relationship between slave and master. Social standards and pressures disagreed with Christian ideals, but the Christian master was to practice those ideals just the same. He was to treat his slave like a person and like a brother in Christ (Gal. 3:28). He was not to mistreat him; he was to deal with his slave justly and fairly. After all, the Christian slave was a free man in the Lord, and the master was a slave to Christ (1 Cor. 7:22). In the same way, our social and physical relationships must always be governed by our spiritual relationships.

As we review this very practical section of Colossians, we see once again the preeminence of Jesus Christ in our lives as believers. Christ must be the Head of the home. This series of admonitions is actually a practical application of Colossians 3:17: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." It is by His power and authority that we should live in our daily relationships. If He is the preeminent One in our lives, then we will love each other, submit to each other, obey, and treat one another fairly in the Lord.

It would be well for us to review Ephesians 5:18–6:9 and note the parallels between that passage and the one we have just studied. This section of Ephesians emphasizes being filled with the Spirit, while the Letter to the Colossians emphasizes being filled with the Word; but the evidences are the same: joyful, thankful, and submissive living. To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Word.

The fullness of the Spirit and the fullness of the Word are needed in the home. If family members are controlled by the Spirit of God and the Word of God, they will be joyful, thankful, and submissive—and they will have little trouble getting along with each other. Christian employers and employees will treat each other fairly if they are filled with the Spirit and the Word.

The heart of every problem is the problem of the heart, and only God's Spirit and God's Word can change and control the heart.

Can the people who live with you detect that you are filled with the Spirit and the Word?

*Colossians 4:2–9*

Never underestimate the power of speech.

A judge says a few words, and a man's life is saved or condemned. A doctor speaks a few words, and a patient either rejoices ecstatically or gives up in despair. Whether the communication is oral or written, there is great power in words. I am told that for every word in Adolph Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, 125 persons lost their lives in World War II.

The power of speech is a gift from God, and it must be used the way God ordains. In the Book of James, the tongue is compared to a bridle and a rudder, a fire and a poisonous animal, and a fruitful tree and a fountain (James 3). These three pairs of pictures teach us that the tongue has the power to direct, the power to destroy, and the power to delight. The tongue is but a little member in our bodies, but it can accomplish great things for good or for evil.

In this brief section, Paul pointed to four important ministries of speech.

### **Praying (Col. 4:2–3a)**

Prayer and worship are perhaps the highest uses of the gift of speech. Paul was not ashamed to ask his friends to pray for him. Even though he was an apostle, he needed prayer support for himself and his ministry. If a great Christian like Paul felt the need for prayer support, how much more do you and I need this kind of spiritual help! In these few words, Paul described the characteristics of a satisfying and spiritual prayer life.

First, our praying must be *faithful*. "Continue in prayer" (Col. 4:2). This means, "Be steadfast in your prayer life; be devoted; don't quit." This is the way the early church prayed (Acts 1:14; 2:46). Too many of us pray only occasionally—when we feel like it or when there is a crisis. "Pray without ceasing" is God's command to us (1 Thes. 5:17). This does not mean that we should walk around muttering prayers under our breath. Rather, it means we should be constantly in fellowship with God so that prayer is as normal to us as breathing.

This is not to suggest that God is reluctant to answer prayer and that we must "wear Him out" by our praying. Quite the opposite is true: God enjoys answering our prayers. But He sometimes delays the answer to increase our faith and devotion and to accomplish His purposes at the right time. God's delays are not always God's denials. As we continue in prayer, our own hearts are prepared for the answer God will give. We find ourselves growing in grace even before His answer comes.

Our praying must also be *watchful*. We must be awake and alert as we pray. The phrase "Watch and pray!" is used often in the Bible. It had its beginning in Bible history when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them [the enemy] day and night" (Neh. 4:9). Jesus used the phrase (Mark 13:33; 14:38); Paul used it too (Eph. 6:18).

There is no power in dull, listless praying. If there is no fire on the altar, the incense will not rise to God (Ps. 141:2). Real praying demands spiritual energy and alertness, and this can come only from the Holy Spirit of God. Routine prayers are unanswered prayers.

Our praying should also be *thankful*: "Watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Thanksgiving is an important ingredient in successful praying (Phil. 4:6). If all we do is ask, and never thank God for His gifts, we are selfish. Sincere gratitude to God is one of the best ways to put fervor into our praying.

There is always so much to be thankful for! We have already noted the emphasis in Paul's Letter to the Colossians on thanksgiving (Col. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 17; 4:2). When we recall that Paul was a prisoner when he wrote this letter, it makes this emphasis even more wonderful.



Finally, our praying ought to be *purposeful*: “Praying also for us” (Col. 4:3). Too often our prayers are vague and general. “Lord, bless the missionaries!” How much better it would be if we would pray for specific needs. By doing so, we would know when God answered and we could praise Him for it. Perhaps it is our lack of faith that causes us to pray generally instead of specifically.

It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth. Prayer is not telling God what to do or what to give. Prayer is asking God for that which He wants to do and give, according to His will (1 John 5:14–15). As we read the Word and fellowship with our Father, we discover His will and then boldly ask Him to do what He has planned. Richard Trench (1807–1886), archbishop of Dublin, said it perfectly: “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance; it is laying hold of His willingness.”

Of course, it is possible to pray in our hearts and never use the gift of speech (1 Sam. 1:13); but we are using words even if we don’t say them audibly. True prayer must first come from the heart, whether the words are spoken or not.

Study Paul’s prison prayers (Phil. 1:9–11; Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Col. 1:9–12) for examples of prayer at its best.

### **Proclaiming the Word (Col. 4:3b–4)**

Paul did not ask for the prison doors to be opened, but that doors of ministry might be opened (1 Cor. 16:9; Acts 14:27). It was more important to Paul that he be a faithful minister than a free man. It is worth noting that in all of Paul’s prison prayers, his concern was not for personal safety or material help, but for spiritual character and blessing.

Paul was in prison because of the “mystery of Christ” which related to the Gentiles (see Eph. 3:1–13). The mystery involved God’s purpose for the Gentiles in relation to Israel; for in the church, Jews and Gentiles are one (Eph. 2:11–22). Read the account of Paul’s arrest in the Jewish temple (Acts 21:18–22:30). Note that the Jews listened to Paul till he spoke the word *Gentiles* (Acts 22:21–22). It was Paul’s concern for the Gentiles and his ministry to them that put him into prison.

Even among some believing Jews, there was a kind of bigotry that wanted to force the Gentiles into a lower position (Acts 15:1ff). This extreme legalistic party wanted the Gentiles to become Jews ceremonially before they could become Christians! Paul and Barnabas met this threat to the Gospel of grace head-on and the council decided in their favor. But the legalistic party continued to oppose Paul and his ministry. They did not want the Good News of the mystery of Christ to get to the Gentiles. They wanted to maintain their air of Jewish superiority.

How strange that Paul would want God to help him do the very thing that had caused his arrest! He had no intention of giving up his ministry or of changing his message. When John Bunyan was arrested for preaching illegally and put into prison, he was told that he would be released if he promised to stop preaching. “If I am out of prison today,” he replied, “I will preach the Gospel again tomorrow, by the help of God.”

How could Paul share the mystery of Christ when he was a prisoner? Paul’s case was discussed by many people; Paul was also able to witness to the guards to whom he was chained (Phil. 1:12–18). Imagine being chained to the Apostle Paul! Through this witness, the Gospel was carried into parts of Rome that would have been inaccessible to Paul had he been a free man. There were even “saints in Caesar’s household”! (Phil. 4:22)

The proclamation of the Gospel is empowered by prayer. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God as we come to the throne of grace and ask God for His blessing. We must never separate the Word of God from prayer because God has joined them together (Acts 6:4).

A visitor at Spurgeon's Tabernacle in London was being shown around the building by the pastor, Charles Spurgeon.

"Would you like to see the powerhouse of this ministry?" Spurgeon asked, as he showed the man into a lower auditorium. "It is here that we get our power, for while I am preaching upstairs, hundreds of my people are in this room praying." Is it any wonder that God blessed Spurgeon's preaching of the Word?

You, as a church member, can assist your pastor in the preaching of the Word by praying for him. Never say to your pastor, "Well, the least I can do is to pray for you." The *most* you can do is to pray! Pray for your pastor as he prepares the Word, studies, and meditates. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give deeper insights into the truths of the Word. Pray too that your pastor will practice the Word that he preaches so that it will be real in his own life. As he preaches the message, pray that the Spirit will give him freedom of utterance, and that the Word will reach into hearts and minds in a powerful way. (It wouldn't hurt to pray for other church leaders too.)

The proclaiming of the Word of God is a great privilege and a tremendous responsibility. You do not have to be an ordained preacher or a missionary to share God's Word. Even in your daily conversation you can drop the seed of the Word into hearts, and then pray that God will water that seed and bring forth fruit.

### **Witnessing to the Lost (Col. 4:5–6)**

"Them that are without" refers to those who are outside the family of God. Jesus made a distinction between His disciples and those who were outside (Mark 4:11). Paul also made this same distinction (1 Cor. 5:12–13). Those of us who are born again are the "spiritual insiders" because we belong to God's family and share His life.

However, as Christians, we must never have a sanctified superiority complex. We have a responsibility to witness to the lost around us and to seek to bring them into God's family. To begin with, we have the responsibility to *walk wisely* (Col. 4:5). *Walk* refers, of course, to our conduct in daily life. The unsaved outsiders watch us Christians and are very critical of us. There must be nothing in our lives that would jeopardize our testimony.

This story has often been told about Dr. Will H. Houghton, who pastored the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City and later served as president of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute till his death in 1946. When Dr. Houghton became pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta, a man in that city hired a private detective to follow Dr. Houghton and report on his conduct. After a few weeks, the detective was able to report to the man that Dr. Houghton's life matched his preaching. As a result, that man became a Christian.

What does it mean to "walk in wisdom"? For one thing, it means that we are careful not to say or do anything that would make it difficult to share the Gospel. It also means we must be alert to use the opportunities God gives us for personal witnessing. "Redeeming the time" means buying up the opportunity (Eph. 5:16). This is a commercial term and pictures the Christian as a faithful steward who knows an opportunity when he sees one. Just as a merchant seizes a bargain when he finds one, so a Christian seizes the opportunity to win a soul to Christ.

*Walking in wisdom* also includes doing our work, paying our bills, and keeping our promises. We must "walk honestly toward them that are without" (1 Thes. 4:12). A friend of mine went into a store to make a purchase for his church. The salesman asked, "Is ——— a member of your

church?” My friend said that he was, and the salesman proceeded to tell him how much money that church member owed his store and how difficult it was to get anything from him. It would probably have been futile for my friend to witness to that clerk.

Christians in general and Christian leaders in particular must have “a good report of them which are without” (1 Tim. 3:7). When members of a church are calling a new pastor, they ought to investigate his testimony among his neighbors and the businessmen who know him. Even though unsaved people are in the dark spiritually (2 Cor. 4:3–4), they have a great deal of discernment when it comes to the things of this life (Luke 16:8). It is unfortunate when members of a church call a pastor who has not paid his bills and has left behind a bad witness to unsaved people.

It is not enough simply to walk wisely and carefully before unbelievers. We must also *talk* with them and share the Gospel message with them. But we must take care that our speech is controlled by *grace*, so that it points to Christ and glorifies the Lord. This means we must have grace in our hearts (Col. 3:16), because it is from the heart that the mouth speaks. With grace in our hearts and on our lips, we will be faithful witnesses and not judges or prosecuting attorneys!

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke with grace on His lips. “And all . . . wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). Among the many statements about Jesus Christ in Psalm 45 (a messianic psalm) is this: “Grace is poured into Thy lips” (Ps. 45:2). Even when our Lord was dealing with sin, He spoke words of grace.

Our speech is supposed to “minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). But it cannot do that unless we have grace in our hearts and in our words. “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) is God’s ideal for our conversation.

Why did Paul add “seasoned with salt”? (Col. 4:6) In that day, salt was used as a preservative as well as a seasoner. We should never say to anyone, “Now, take this with a grain of salt.” We must put the salt into our speech to make sure it is pure and properly seasoned. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (Eph. 4:29). Our speech must be pure.

Salt was also added to the sacrifices (Lev. 2:13). Perhaps Paul was suggesting that we look on our words as sacrifices offered to God, just as our words of praise are spiritual sacrifices (Heb. 13:15). It would no doubt help us to say the right things in the right manner if we remembered that our words are looked on as sacrifices to God.

It is unfortunate when a Christian speaks in a rude or coarse manner, particularly when the unsaved are listening. “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Meekness is the opposite of harshness, and fear is the opposite of arrogance. There is no place in a Christian’s conversation for a know-it-all attitude. While we need to have convictions and not compromise, we must also cultivate a gracious spirit of love.

The Christian’s *walk* and *talk* must be in harmony with each other. Nothing will silence the lips like a careless life. When character, conduct, and conversation are all working together, it makes for a powerful witness.

### **Sharing Burdens (Col. 4:7–9)**

Paul did not spell out the details of his personal situation in this letter. He left it to his two spiritual brothers, Tychicus and Onesimus, to share the burdens with the church in Colossae. This is another wonderful ministry of speech: we can share our needs and burdens with others; then they can encourage and assist us.

When Paul left Ephesus, he was accompanied by seven other believers—among them, Tychicus (Acts 20:4). These men were helping Paul deliver the love offering from the Gentile churches to the poor saints in Judea (1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8–9). It is possible that Tychicus and Trophimus were the two brethren Paul referred to in his Second Letter to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 8:19–24).

Tychicus shared Paul’s Roman imprisonment and no doubt was helpful to him in many ways. Paul chose Tychicus and Onesimus to deliver the Ephesian letter (Eph. 6:21) and the Colossian letter (Col. 4:7–9). Of course, they also took the personal letter to Philemon. Paul instructed Tychicus to share with the Colossian Christians all the details of his situation there in Rome.

Paul’s description of Tychicus reveals what a splendid Christian Tychicus really was. He was a *beloved brother*, willing to stay with Paul even though the situation was difficult. How encouraging it is to have a Christian at your side when everything seems to be against you!

Tychicus was also a *faithful minister*. His love revealed itself in action. He ministered *to* Paul, and he also ministered *for* Paul to assist him in his many obligations. Someone has said that the greatest ability in the world is dependability, and this is true. Paul could depend on Tychicus to get the job done.

Tychicus was also Paul’s *fellow servant*. Though he was not an apostle himself, he was assisting Paul in his apostolic ministry. Paul and Tychicus worked together in the service of the Lord. Later, Paul was able to send Tychicus to Crete (Titus 3:12), and then to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12).

It was not easy for Tychicus to be associated with Paul, the prisoner; for Paul had many enemies. Nor was it easy for Tychicus to travel as he did, assisting Paul in his various tasks. Tychicus did not take the easy way, but rather the right way. Our churches today could use more members like Tychicus!

Paul also mentioned Onesimus (“one of you”) who himself came from Colossae. He was the runaway slave who belonged to Philemon and who had been won to Christ through Paul’s ministry in Rome. Paul sent Onesimus back to his master with a letter asking Philemon to receive him and forgive him. It is interesting to note that Paul also called Onesimus *faithful* and *beloved*. Onesimus had been a believer only a short time, and yet he had already proved himself to Paul.

These two men had a dual ministry to perform: to encourage the Colossian Christians and to inform them about Paul’s situation. Is it wrong for God’s people to share information in this way? Of course not! Paul was not begging for money or asking for sympathy. He wanted the Colossian saints to know his situation so they could pray for him. While it is true that some Christian workers “use” circumstances selfishly to enlist support, this was not true of Paul. He simply wanted his friends in Colossae to know the facts and to support him in prayer.

In our home, we receive a number of missionary prayer letters. We read them and try to note the special burdens and needs. In my own private devotions, I use several prayer calendars that help me remember to pray about specific needs for different ministries. I appreciate knowing the facts so that I can intercede in a specific way. I also enjoy getting reports of how God has answered prayer, for this encourages my faith.

Praying, proclaiming the Word, witnessing, and sharing burdens—these are four wonderful ministries of speech. How much better it is to be involved in these ministries than to be using our tongues for gossip, malicious criticism, and other sinful purposes.

Let’s make David’s prayer our prayer: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3).

## *Colossians 4:10–18*

Paul was not only a soul winner; he was a great friend-maker. If my count is correct, there are more than 100 different Christians (named and unnamed) associated with Paul in the Book of Acts and in his epistles. He named 26 different friends in Romans 16 alone!

It was customary in Paul's day to close each letter with personal greetings. Friends did not see one another that much, and letter service was very slow and limited. Of course, Paul's greetings were much more than social; they conveyed his genuine spiritual concern for his friends. In this closing section, Paul sent personal greetings to Colossae from six of his associates in the ministry: Aristarchus, John Mark, and Jesus Justus, all of whom were Jews; and Epaphras, Luke, and Demas, who were Gentiles. Paul then added special greetings to two church assemblies, with a special word to one of the pastors.

When we first read this list of names, we are probably not greatly moved. But when we get behind the scenes and discover the drama of these men's lives as they worked with Paul, the list becomes very exciting. We can categorize these men into three groups.

### **The Men Who Stayed (Col. 4:10–11, 14a)**

This group is made up of three Jews (Aristarchus, John Mark, Jesus Justus), and one Gentile (Luke). All of them were characterized by faithfulness to the Apostle Paul in his hour of special need. They were the men who stayed.

***Aristarchus (v. 10a).*** This man was identified as Paul's fellow prisoner and fellow worker (Col. 4:11). Aristarchus was from Macedonia and was one of Paul's traveling companions (Acts 19:29). He was originally from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4) and willingly risked his life in that Ephesian riot (Acts 19:28–41). He sailed with Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2), which meant he also experienced the storm and shipwreck that Luke so graphically described in Acts 27.

Aristarchus stayed with Paul no matter what the circumstances were—a riot in Ephesus, a voyage, a storm, or even a prison. It is not likely that Aristarchus was an official Roman prisoner. "Fellow prisoner" probably means that Aristarchus shared Paul's confinement with him so that he could be a help and comfort to the apostle. He was a voluntary prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

Paul could not have accomplished all that he did apart from the assistance of his friends. Aristarchus stands out as one of the greatest of Paul's helpers. He did not look for an easy task. He did not run when the going got tough. He suffered and labored with Paul.

***John Mark (v. 10b).*** Mark, the writer of the second Gospel, played a very important part in the early history of the church. He too was a Jew, a native of Jerusalem where his mother, Mary, kept "open house" for the believers (Acts 12:12). John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas, the man who went with Paul on that first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3). It is a good possibility that John Mark was led to faith in Christ through the ministry of Peter (1 Peter 5:13).

When Paul and Barnabas set out on that first missionary journey, they took John Mark with them as their assistant. He probably took care of the travel arrangements, supplies, etc. But when the going got tough, John Mark abandoned the preachers and returned home to Jerusalem (Acts 13:5–13).

Why John quit is not explained in Scripture. Perhaps he was afraid, for the group was about to move into dangerous territory. Perhaps he resented the fact that Paul was taking over the

leadership of the mission and replacing his relative, Barnabas. Or maybe John Mark resented Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Whatever the reason or excuse, he left them and returned home.

Later, when Paul and Barnabas wanted to go on a second journey, Paul refused to take John Mark along (Acts 15:36–41). Was Paul wrong in his assessment of this young man? Perhaps, but we cannot blame Paul for being cautious when John Mark had failed him in the past. Paul was not running a popular tour; he was seeking to win lost souls to Christ. No amount of danger or inconvenience could hinder Paul from reaching unbelievers with the Gospel. It was too bad that John Mark caused a division between Paul and Barnabas. However, we must admit that Paul did forgive John Mark and commend him: "Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

Mark, Titus, and Timothy were young men who served as special representatives for the Apostle Paul. He could send them to churches that were having problems and trust them to help solve them. By the grace of God, John Mark had overcome his first failure and had become a valuable servant of God. He was even chosen to write the Gospel of Mark!

John Mark is an encouragement to everyone who has failed in his first attempts to serve God. He did not sit around and sulk. He got back into the ministry and proved himself faithful to the Lord and to the Apostle Paul. He was one of the men who stayed.

I might add that it is good to be a Barnabas and encourage younger Christians in the Lord. Perhaps John Mark would have made it without the help of cousin Barnabas, but I doubt it. God used Barnabas to encourage John Mark and restore him to service again. Barnabas lived up to his name: "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36, NIV).

**Jesus Justus (v. 11).** Jesus Justus was a Jewish believer who served with Paul, but we know nothing about him. The name *Jesus* (Joshua) was a popular Jewish name, and it was not unusual for Jewish people to have a Roman name as well (Justus). John Mark is a case in point. Jesus Justus represents those faithful believers who serve God but whose deeds are not announced for the whole world to know. He was a fellow worker with Paul and a comfort to Paul, and that is all we know about him. However, the Lord has kept a faithful record of this man's life and ministry and will reward him accordingly.

**Luke (v. 14a).** Luke was a very important man in the early church. He was a Gentile, yet he was chosen by God to write the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. He is probably the only Gentile writer of any book of the Bible. He was also a physician and was dearly loved by Paul. The profession of medicine had been perfected by the Greeks, and physicians were held in the highest regard. Even though Paul had the power to heal people, he traveled with a physician!

Luke joined Paul and his party at Troas (note the pronoun *we* in Acts 16:10). Luke traveled with Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:5ff) and was with him on the voyage to Rome (Acts 27:1ff). No doubt Luke's personal presence and his professional skill were a great encouragement to Paul during that very difficult time. While God can and does bring strength and healing in miraculous ways, He also uses the means provided in nature, such as medication. When my wife and I ministered to missionaries in Africa, a physician friend and his wife traveled with us; and we were grateful for their help.

Luke remained with Paul to the very end (see 2 Tim. 4:11). God used Luke to write the Book of Acts and to give us the inspired history of the early church and the ministry of Paul. Luke is a glowing example of the professional man who uses his skills in the service of the Lord and gives himself to go wherever God sends. He was a beloved Christian, a skillful physician, a devoted friend, and a careful historian—all wrapped up in one!

## The Man Who Prayed (Col. 4:12–13)

We met Epaphras at the beginning of this study, for he was the man who founded the church in Colossae (Col. 1:7–8). He had been led to Christ through Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, and had returned home to share the Good News of salvation. It seems likely that Epaphras also founded the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). In our modern terms, Epaphras became a “home missionary.”

What motivated Epaphras to share the Gospel? He was “a servant of Christ” (Col. 4:12). Paul called him “our dear fellow servant ... a faithful minister of Christ” (Col. 1:7). Epaphras loved Jesus Christ and wanted to serve Him and share His message of salvation. But he did not do it alone. Epaphras also believed in the ministry of the local church, and in working with other saints. He was not just a “servant”; he was a “*fellow* servant.”

I was chatting one day with a foreign mission executive about a mutual friend who had been forced to resign from his work on the field. “There was no problem with sin or anything like that,” my friend explained. “His whole difficulty is that he is a loner. He can’t work well with other people. On the mission field, it’s a team effort or it’s nothing.”

One of the secrets of the ministry of Epaphras was his prayer life. Paul knew about this because Epaphras and Paul shared the same room, and when Epaphras prayed, Paul knew about it. What were the characteristics of this man’s prayer life?

***He prayed constantly*** (v. 12—“*always*”). He was a good example of Paul’s admonition: “Continue in prayer” (Col. 4:2). Epaphras did not pray only when he felt like it, as do many Christians today. Nor did he pray when he was told to pray, or when the other believers prayed. He was constantly in prayer, seeking God’s blessing.

***He prayed fervently*** (v. 12—“*laboring fervently*”). The word used here means “agonizing.” It is the same word used for our Lord’s praying in the Garden (Luke 22:44). We get the impression that prayer was serious business with Epaphras! This Greek word was used to describe the athletes as they gave themselves fully to their sports. If church members today put as much concern and enthusiasm into their praying as they did into their baseball games or bowling, we would have revival!

***He prayed personally*** (v. 12—“*for you*”). Epaphras did not pray around the world for everybody in general and nobody in particular. He centered his intercession on the saints in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. No doubt he mentioned some of them by name. Prayer for Epaphras was not an impersonal religious exercise, for he carried these people in his heart and prayed for them personally.

***He prayed definitely***. If you had asked Epaphras, “What are you praying for?” he could have told you. His great desire was that the believers in those three assemblies might mature in their Christian faith. Paul used four significant words to summarize the prayer of Epaphras, and these four words also summarize the message of the Book of Colossians: “perfect—complete—all—will.”

Epaphras was concerned that these Christians know and do the will of God. But he wanted them to be involved in *all* the will of God, not just in part of it. (*All* is a key word in Colossians, used over thirty times.) He also wanted them to stand *perfect* and *complete* in God’s will. The gnostic teachers offered these Christians “perfection and maturity,” but they could not deliver the goods. Only in Jesus Christ can we have these blessings. “And ye are complete in Him,” for only in Christ does the fullness of God dwell (Col. 2:9–10).

This request carries the thought of being mature and perfectly assured in the will of God, and parallels Paul’s prayer burden (Col. 2:2). “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.

*He prayed sacrificially (v. 13—"great zeal" or "much distress").* Real prayer is difficult. When Jesus prayed in the Garden, He sweat great drops of blood. Paul had "great conflict" (agony) as he prayed for the Colossians (2:1), and Epaphras also experienced "much distress." This does not mean that we must wrestle with God in order to get Him to answer. But it does mean that we must throw ourselves into our praying with zeal and concern. If there is no burden, there can be no blessing. To rephrase what John H. Jowett said about preaching: "Praying that costs nothing accomplishes nothing."

All of the men with Paul were named and commended in one way or another, but Epaphras was the only one commended for his prayer ministry. This does not mean that the other men did not pray; but it does suggest that prayer was his major interest and ministry. Epaphras was Paul's fellow prisoner (Phile. 23)—but even confinement could not keep him from entering the courts of heaven and praying for his brothers and sisters in the churches.

E.M. Bounds was a prayer-warrior of the last generation. He would often rise early in the morning and pray for many hours before he began the work of the day. His many books on prayer testify to the fact that Bounds, like Epaphras, knew how to agonize in prayer before God. (If you have never read *Power in Prayer* [Baker] by E.M. Bounds, by all means do so.)

I am impressed with the fact that Epaphras prayed for believers in three different cities. We are fortunate today if church members pray for their own pastor and church, let alone believers in other places! Perhaps one reason that revival tarries is because we do not pray fervently for one another.

### **The Man Who Strayed (Col. 4:14b)**

Demas is mentioned only three times in Paul's letters, and these three references tell a sad story. First he is called "Demas ... my fellow laborer" and is linked with three good men—Mark, Aristarchus, and Luke (Phile. 24). Then he is simply called "Demas," and there is no special word of identification or commendation (Col. 4:14). But the third reference tells what became of Demas: "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

At one point in his life, John Mark had forsaken Paul; but he was reclaimed and restored. Demas forsook Paul and apparently was never reclaimed. His sin was that he loved this present world. The word *world* refers to the whole system of things that runs this world, or "society without God." In the first of his epistles, John the Apostle pointed out that the world entices the believer with "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:15–17). Which of these traps caught Demas, we do not know; perhaps he fell into all three.

But we do know that Christians today can succumb to the world just as Demas did. How easy it is to maintain a religious veneer, while all the time we are living for the things of this world. Demas thought that he could serve two masters, but eventually he had to make a decision; unfortunately, he made the wrong decision.

It must have hurt Paul greatly when Demas forsook him. It also hurt the work of the Lord, for there never has been a time when the laborers were many. This decision hurt Demas most of all, for he wasted his life in that which could never last. "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:17).

After conveying greetings from his friends and fellow servants, Paul himself sent greetings to the sister churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis. These people had never seen Paul (Col. 2:1), yet he was interested in them and concerned about their spiritual welfare.



## Final Greetings (Col. 4:15–18)

We know nothing about Nymphas, except that he had a church meeting in his house. (Some versions read *Nympha* and seem to indicate that this believer was a woman.) In the first centuries of the church, local assemblies met in private homes. Even today, many new local churches get their start this way. It was not until the Christian faith emerged from persecution into official government approval that church buildings were constructed. It really matters little where the assembly meets, so long as Jesus Christ is the center of the fellowship. (For other examples of “the church in the home,” see Rom. 16:5 and 1 Cor. 16:19.)

Paul’s great concern was that the Word of God be read and studied in these churches. The verb *read* means “to read aloud.” There would not be copies of these letters for each member. It is a strong conviction of mine that we need to return to the public reading of the Word of God in many of our churches. “Give attendance to reading” (1 Tim. 4:13) means the public reading of God’s Word.

It is worth noting that the various letters from Paul were good for *all* of these assemblies. In my ministry, I have shared God’s Word in many different places and situations, and it has always reached the heart and met the need. Even in different cultures, God’s Word has a message for the heart. God’s Word does not have to be edited or changed to meet different problems in various situations, for it is always applicable.

What was “the epistle from Laodicea”? We do not know for sure. Some scholars think that the Epistle to the Ephesians was this missing letter, but this idea is pure speculation. The fact that this letter has been lost does not mean we are missing a part of God’s inspired Word. Some of Paul’s correspondence with the church at Corinth has also been lost. God not only inspired His Word, but He providentially watched over it so that nothing would be lost that was supposed to be in that Word. Instead of wondering about what we do not have, we should be applying ourselves to what we do have!

When we compare Colossians 4:17 with Philemon 2, we get the impression that Archippus belonged to the family of Philemon. Possibly, he was Philemon’s son and the pastor of the church that met in Philemon’s house. We cannot prove this, of course, but it does seem a logical conclusion. This would make Apphia the wife of Philemon.

Paul’s last words before his salutation are directed at Archippus as an encouragement to continue faithfully in his ministry. Was Archippus discouraged? Had the gnostic false teachers invaded his church and created problems for him? We do not know. But we do know that pastors of local churches face many problems and carry many burdens, and they often need a word of encouragement.

Paul reminded Archippus that his ministry was a gift from God, and that he was a steward of God who would one day have to give an account of his work. Since the Lord gave him his ministry, the Lord could also help him carry it out in the right way. Ministry is not something we do for God; it is something God does in and through us.

The word *fulfill* carries with it the idea that God has definite purposes for His servants to accomplish. He works in us and through us to complete those good works that He has prepared for us (see Eph. 2:10). Of course, *fulfill* also parallels the theme of Colossians—the fullness of Jesus Christ available to each believer. We are able to fulfill our ministries because we have been “filled full” through Jesus Christ.

Unless we make a practical application of Bible doctrine, our study is in vain. After reading this letter and studying it, we cannot help but see that we have in Jesus Christ all that we can ever want or need. All of God’s fullness is in Jesus Christ and we have been made complete in Him.

What an encouragement this must have been to Archippus! What an encouragement it should be to us today!

Paul usually dictated his letters to a secretary (see Rom. 16:22) and then signed his name at the end. He always added a sentence about the grace of God, for this was his “trademark” (see 2 Thes. 3:17–18). The combination of his signature and “grace” gave proof that the letter was authentic.

The New Testament contains many references to Paul’s bonds and the fact that he was a prisoner (see Acts 20:23; 23:18, 29; 26:29; Phil. 1:7, 13–14, 16; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:9; Phile. 10, 13; Eph. 3:1; 4:1). Why did Paul want them to remember his bonds? Primarily because those bonds were a reminder of his love for lost souls, especially the Gentiles. He was “the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). Paul’s bonds were evidence of his obedience to the Lord and his willingness to pay any price so that the Gentiles might hear the Gospel.

Even today, there are devoted Christians who are in bonds because of their faithfulness to the Lord. We ought to remember them and pray for them. “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them” (Heb. 13:3).

As we come to the close of our study of this remarkable letter, we must remind ourselves that we are complete in Jesus Christ. We should beware of any teaching that claims to give us “something more” than we already have in Christ. All of God’s fullness is in Him, and He has perfectly equipped us for the life that God wants us to live. We do not live and grow by *addition*, but by *appropriation*.

May the Lord help us to live as those who are complete in Christ.

**Lightner, R. P. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 683-685) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

3:18. **Wives** are to **submit to** their **husbands as** their heads. This command was not limited to Paul’s day, as is obvious from two reasons he gave elsewhere: (1) the order of Creation (man was created first, then woman; 1 Tim. 2:13); (2) the order within the Godhead (Christ submits to the Father; 1 Cor. 11:3). Submission or subordination does not mean inferiority; it simply means that the husband, not the wife, is head of the home. If he may be thought of as the “president,” she is the “vice-president.”

Of course there are moral limits to this submission; it is only **as is fitting in the Lord**. Just as obedience to government is commanded (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13) but only insofar as government takes its place under God (Ex. 1; Dan. 3; 6), even so a wife’s submission to her husband is only “in the Lord.” That is, she is not obligated to follow her husband’s leadership if it conflicts with specific scriptural commands.

3:19. **Husbands** are responsible to **love** their **wives** (as Christ loved the church; Eph. 5:28–29). So they are to exercise loving leadership, not dictatorial dominion. Perhaps husbands need this reminder to be tender and loving as much or more than wives need the reminder not to usurp authority over their husbands. Assuming absolute authority will only embitter one’s wife, not endear her. The words **be harsh** translate *pikrainesthe*, which is more literally, “make bitter.” (A different word is used in Col. 3:21; see comments there.) Wives, like tender and sensitive flowers (cf. 1 Peter 3:7), may wilt under authoritarian dominance but blossom with tender loving care. So in a maturing marriage the husband exercises compassionate care and his wife responds in willing submission to this loving leadership.

3:20. **Children** are to **obey** their **parents in everything**. Disobedience to parents is designated in the Old Testament as rebellion against God and was severely punished (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). Jesus set an example for children by obeying Joseph and His mother Mary (Luke 2:51). Obedience to parents **pleases the Lord**. This does not suggest that obeying one's parents merits salvation for a child. Rather, obedience reflects God's design for order in the home. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "It is right" (*dikaion*, "just" or "proper") for children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1).

3:21. **Fathers** (and mothers; cf. Prov. 1:8; 6:20) should not presume on this obedience and **embitter** (*erethizete*, "provoke or irritate") their **children** by continual agitation and unreasonable demands. Paul wrote, "Fathers, do not exasperate (*parorgizete*) your children" (Eph. 6:4). This will only make them **become discouraged**. Praise for well-doing rather than constant criticism will, along with loving discipline (cf. Heb. 12:7), help rear children in "the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

3:22–25. **Slaves** are exhorted to **obey** (the same word is directed to children in v. 20) their **earthly masters**. "Earthly" is literally "according to the flesh"; only Christ is master of the *spirits* of believing slaves. This obedience is to be **with sincerity of heart**, not simply when their masters are watching them or **to win their favor**. Also slaves are to work with **reverence for the Lord**. Working with an awareness of God's character and presence enhances the dignity of the labor of even slaves. In fact, **whatever** (cf. v. 17) slaves **do** should be **with all their heart[s]** (lit., "out of the soul," i.e., genuine and from within, not merely by outward pretense) and **for the Lord, not for men**. While slavery was certainly undesirable, Paul's goals did not include restructuring social institutions (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17–24). Principles in Colossians 3:22–25 for Christian slaves may be applied today to Christian employees. If more Christian employees today served their employers with genuine concern and as though they were serving God, quality and productivity would increase dramatically! **It is the Lord Christ** whom all Christians **are serving**. (This is the only place in the NT where the term "the Lord Christ" is used.) After all, the final "payday" (**an inheritance ... as a reward**) is coming **from the Lord** (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). He will judge without **favoritism** (cf. Rom. 2:9; Eph. 6:9), that is, in full justice, repaying wrongdoers and rewarding those who serve Him.

In these verses (Col. 3:22–25) Paul made numerous points about the motives, attitudes, and conduct of Christian slaves. Such instruction was remarkable in a master-slave society.

4:1. On the other hand **masters** were to **provide** ("give deliberate care") for their **slaves with what is right** (*dikaion*) and **fair** (*isotēta*, "equitable"). After all, masters themselves are responsible to the Lord, their **Master in heaven**, who treats them fairly. If employers of nonslaves today manifested this kind of compassionate and impartial care for their employees, certainly their employees' motivation to work would radically improve.

#### B. *Perfecting one's prayer life (4:2–4).*

4:2. Paul not only practiced a mature prayer life (cf. 1:3–12) but he also prescribed it for all believers. They should **devote** themselves **to** (lit., "persist, continue in"; cf. Rom. 12:12) **prayer**. Prayer is not a spiritual luxury; it is essential for growth. Prayer—as vital to one's spiritual health as breathing is to one's physical health—should be continual (1 Thes. 5:17), not casual. In his praying, a Christian should be **watchful** ("alert, aware") against spiritual drowsiness caused by attention to the world (Matt. 24:42; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thes. 5:6) and/or by the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:16; 1 Peter 5:8). Being **thankful** should always accompany prayer (Phil. 4:6;

Col. 1:12; 3:16–17; 1 Thes. 5:18), for it places a believer in the proper attitude before God (cf. Rom. 1:21).

4:3–4. **Pray for us** was a request Paul often made of his readers (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 6:19; 1 Thes. 5:25; 2 Thes. 3:1). His request was not selfish; it was for an **open ... door** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12) through which he could clearly minister the gospel **message ... the mystery of Christ** (cf. Eph. 3:4; 6:19; Col. 1:26–27; 2:2), **for which** he was **in chains** (cf. Phil. 1:7, 13–14, 16; Col. 4:18; Phile. 1, 9–10, 13). He desired not only an opportunity to preach but also clarity in preaching: **that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should** (i.e., “as I am obligated to”; cf. Rom. 1:14–15).

### C. *Perfecting one’s public life (4:5–6).*

4:5–6. Completion or perfection in Christ includes not only one’s private (and prayer) life but also one’s public life. To perfect this dimension of one’s life in Christ, Paul told believers to **be wise in the way they act**. This wisdom (*sophia*; cf. 1:9; 28; 3:16), which is God’s, not man’s (cf. James 3:13, 17), should be evident to **outsiders**, that is, those outside the “household of faith” (cf. 1 Cor. 5:12; 1 Thes. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:7). Also Paul’s readers should **make the most of every opportunity** (lit., “buy up [*exagorazomenoi*] the time”). They should be ready “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2) to proclaim Christ. In addition, their **conversation** (*logos*, “word, discourse, talking”) should **be always full of** (lit., “in”) **grace** (“gracious, pleasing”; cf. Col. 3:8–9) and yet **seasoned with salt** (i.e., pure and penetrating; 4:6). In this way they could **answer everyone** who asked “the reason for the hope” (1 Peter 3:15) they had.

### D. *Perfecting one’s personal life (4:7–17)*

Paul set an example for mature interpersonal relations. Besides remembering his friends and companions, he expressed genuine concern for them.

4:7–8. **Tychicus** (a leader in the church and bearer of this letter) was **a dear brother, a faithful minister** (cf. Eph. 6:21), **and a fellow servant** with Paul in the ministry. He was from the province of Asia (Acts 20:4) and was mentioned by Paul also in 2 Timothy 4:12 and Titus 3:12. Paul sent him to Colosse **for the express purpose** of informing them about his state of affairs to **encourage** them.

4:9. **Onesimus** (a converted runaway slave of Philemon) was also **a faithful and dear brother** (cf. Phile. 16) to Paul and a fellow Colossian: **one of you** (cf. Col. 4:12). He would accompany Tychicus and also report on Paul’s circumstances.

4:10. **Aristarchus** was a Thessalonian who accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). Being Paul’s **fellow prisoner** meant either that Aristarchus attended Paul, or more likely, that he was incarcerated with Paul (probably also for preaching the gospel). Paul also called him a fellow worker (Phile. 24).

**Mark, the cousin of Barnabas**, was a companion on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). He was later Peter’s associate (“my son,” 1 Peter 5:13; cf. Acts 12:12–13). Though Mark deserted Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 15:37–39), Paul here commended him (cf. Phile. 24), as he did later (2 Tim 4:11).

4:11. **Jesus** was a common Jewish name. This companion of Paul’s was also **called Justus** (“righteous”), also a common name (Acts 1:23; 18:7). These three—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus—were **Jews** (lit., “of the circumcision”) by either birth or conversion (proselytism). These three **fellow workers for the kingdom of God** comforted or consoled Paul by their loving

loyalty to him. **Comfort** is the unusual word *parēgoria* (“relief, consolation”), found only here in the New Testament.

4:12–13. **Epaphras**, like Onesimus (v. 9), was a Colossian (**one of you**) whom Paul depicted as **a servant of Christ Jesus** who was **always wrestling** (*agōnizomenos*; cf. 1:29) **in prayer** (as Jacob did with the angel; Gen. 32) **for** the Colossians. His concern was that the Colossians would **stand firm in God’s will ... mature** (*teleioi*, “perfected”) **and fully assured** (Rom. 4:21; 14:5) or fulfilled. This fits the overall theme of Colossians: that believers be mature, perfected in Christ. Epaphras’ prayerful concern went to the point of **working hard** (lit., “has much pain”; *ponon*, “pain or distress,” is used only here and in Rev. 16:10–11). His painful labor was for all the believers in the Lycus Valley—those in Colosse, **Laodicea, and Hierapolis** (see the location of these three on the map between Acts and Rom.).

4:14. **Luke**, Paul’s **dear friend** and **doctor**, stood firm not only in this earlier imprisonment but also in Paul’s latter imprisonment, by which time **Demas** (here with Paul) had forsaken him (2 Tim. 4:10). Luke is the author of the Third Gospel and of Acts (cf. Acts 1:1). By tradition he was one of the 72 (Luke 10:1). Some also suggest he was the anonymous disciple on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13). Since the only men with Paul who were “of the circumcision” were Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus (Justus), Luke may have been a Gentile.

4:15. Paul asked that his **greetings** be given **to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha** in whose **house** the **church** met. Churches meeting in homes was a common practice then before there were church buildings (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phile. 2).

4:16. Paul urged an exchange of epistles; once they had read Colossians they should send it to Laodicea and **read the letter** (coming) **from Laodicea**. This “Laodicean letter” may be the letter to the Ephesians, which was written about that time, and sent to the same general vicinity.

4:17. **Archippus**, probably the son of Philemon (cf. Phile. 2), was ministering in Colosse, possibly in Epaphras’ absence. Paul exhorted his readers to **tell Archippus to see to** (*blepe*, “look out” for dangers in) **it that he complete the work** (lit., “the ministry”) God had given him. Whatever his problem, he was not fulfilling (completing) his work. This was another example of Paul’s concern that the Colossians be complete in Christ.

#### *E. Salutation (4:18).*

4:18. As was Paul’s custom and sign of authenticity, he signed a **greeting** with his **own hand** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; 2 Thes. 3:17; Phile. 19). He then asked that his readers **remember** (in prayerful support) his imprisonment (**chains**; cf. Col. 4:3). As with so many of his epistles, his closing was a benediction, a prayer that God’s **grace** (cf. 1:2) **be with** them (see the chart, “Paul’s Concluding Benedictions in His Epistles” near Rom. 16:20).

***Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 592-593). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

#### **FAMILY LIFE (3:18–4:1)**

Paul turned to the issue of household relationships. He addressed husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and masters. As in Ephesians 5:21–6:9, Paul arranged his discussion to treat the subordinate person first (wife, child, or slave). Paul immediately followed each statement with a reminder of the responsibility of the second member of each pair. The distinctly Christian contribution to the ordering of family life was the stress on reciprocal responsibilities.

Even in culture where family relationships were given an importance and significance not widespread in antiquity, it was generally assumed that husbands and fathers had rights to be exercised but few duties. Wives and children assumed they had duties but no or few rights. Paul stressed that all household members had rights and duties. Paul here taught a picture of family life implicit in Jesus' teaching concerning marriage (see Mark 10:2–16).

#### **CONDUCT AND SPEECH (4:2–6)**

This section concludes with further instructions to continue in prayer and to conduct themselves in a worthy manner toward others. Believers' conduct and speech should be carefully controlled and used with great wisdom and love.

#### **CONCLUSION (4:7–18)**

Paul's lengthy conclusion included personal news, greetings, and final instructions. The conclusion gives the letter, which is strategically polemical in places, a real personal touch. The apostles referred to Tychicus, who carried this letter plus Ephesians and Philemon, and to Onesimus, the runaway slave who accompanied him. They were to give a report to the church concerning Paul and Epaphras as well as pertinent information regarding Onesimus's situation.

Paul often sent greetings from those with him. He mentioned Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus (Justus), Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and companion with Paul and Barnabas on the first journey (see Acts 12:12, 25; 13:4). But Mark had turned back before the journey was finished, and Paul did not want to take him on future journeys (see Acts 13:4, 13; 15:37). Evidently Mark had reconciled himself with Paul.

The reference to a Laodicean letter in 4:16 has called forth numerous suggestions. Some have identified Paul's letter to the Ephesians as this letter. Others have suggested that Philemon was the letter to which Paul referred. Still others have identified the reference to a lost letter to the Laodiceans. We cannot know for sure. Archippus was encouraged to fulfill the temporary ministry he had received. He fittingly asked to be remembered in prayer. Paul concluded with a brief benediction written in his own hand. This probably implies that Paul dictated the letter to a secretary and then signed it himself (see Rom. 16:22).

***Theological Significance.*** In Colosse a religious philosophy appeared that challenged the essence of Christian teaching. It contained Jewish elements (2:16), had an aspect of angel worship (2:18), and had a strong ascetic emphasis (2:20–23). This philosophy brought divisions to the church. It had some parallels with Christianity, but its teaching about Christ was wrongheaded. Today similar movements exist that confront the church's theology about Christ as well as its spirituality. The proper response needed in the church then is the same today. These contemporary New Age teachings must be recognized for what they are. The church must readily affirm that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9). Any effort to approach God through angelic or human intermediaries is not only misguided, but it is a denial of Christ and authentic Christian teaching.

***Fields, W. C. (1972). Colossians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 755-756). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

### **Practical Advice (Col. 3:5–4:6)**

Paul lists some examples of behavior which should be shunned and some which should be adopted. Here Colossians and Ephesians resemble each other. In both, Paul regards Christian conduct as inseparable from Christian concepts. Knowing and saying the right things are important, but this mental activity is empty without the authentication of doing the right things.

In 3:5–11 he itemizes some things that are inconsistent with the Christian calling. In 3:12–17 he indicates some qualities that are desirable. In 3:17 he gives a good rule of thumb for Christian behavior: “Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

There follows a series of exhortations relating to the Christian household: wives (v. 18), husbands (v. 19), children (v. 20), fathers (v. 21), servants (vv. 22–25), masters (4:1) and for the saints generally (vv. 2–6). In these instances the added dimension over common pagan practices of the time is in Paul’s phrase, “as it is fit in the Lord” (3:18). Be thoroughly Christian in these relationships!

*Special points.*—The master-slave relationship (3:22–4:1) had many evils about it in Paul’s day. It was manifestly impractical for the struggling, emerging church to try at that stage to overthrow the institution of slavery. Paul did not wait, however, to suggest some ways of changing the conditions of slavery. It was to be changed from within, by transforming both the master and the slave. This message is borne out most clearly in the epistle to Philemon. Paul is concerned with human attitudes. Christ can make a difference in these regardless of the political or social circumstances.

### **Personal Greetings (Col. 4:7–17)**

The note about Tychicus (vv. 7–8) is almost identical with Ephesians 6:21–22 and suggests that he was the bearer of letters to both Colossae and Ephesus. Onesimus, the runaway slave, returns to Colossae with Tychicus as a believer and “brother” (4:9). The personal letter to his owner, Philemon, is also delivered at the same time.

Three Jewish brethren in Rome send greetings. Aristarchus, a “fellow prisoner,” probably is the same one who was seized by a mob in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Only here (4:10) do we learn that Mark is the nephew to Barnabas. Paul had some harsh words to say about Mark (Acts 15:36 f.) when he dropped out of the group on the first missionary journey. Now apparently he is reconciled with him. Nothing else is known of “Jesus, who is called Justus” (4:11).

Three Gentile brethren also send greetings from Rome. Epaphras is one of their own (vv. 12–13). Luke is identified only here (v. 14) as a physician. The only other information we have on Demas is in 2 Timothy 4:10 where in Paul’s final letter he says sadly that Demas had forsaken him for the “present world.”

House churches, such as the one mentioned in Nymphas’ house at Laodicea (v. 15), are noted several times in Paul’s writings. We do not have the epistle to Laodicea mentioned in 4:16, at least by that name. Archippus (v. 17) is mentioned also in Philemon 1 and may have been standing in for the absent Epaphras as the leader of the church at Colossae.

### **Conclusion (Col. 4:18)**

Paul closes in his own handwriting. This suggests that he may have employed an amanuensis or scribe to write the letter up to this point.

“Remember my bonds” is a touching reminder of Paul’s circumstances as a prisoner in Rome.

He closes with his customary greeting, “Grace be with you.”

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Colossians 3:18-4:18. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

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