

Mid Week • Colossians 4

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 begins with a continuation of Paul's application of what it means to be new men and women in Christ in terms of the basic relationships of life
Chapter 3 ends with his instructions to husbands and wives, to children & parents and to servants.

V. 1 of chapter 4 picks up the same theme as Paul now turns to masters and how they are to treat those over whom they exercise authority . . .

CHAPTER 4

¹ Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

It's important as we look at what Paul wrote here to masters, and their servants in their verses just prior to this, that we consider the historical context.

We think we know what slavery was, but it was far more complex than most of us realize.

We tend to view slavery through the lens of 18th & 19th Century America and the enslavement of Black Africans on the plantations of the South.

Our view of slavery has largely been shaped by movies, novels, and the occasional mini-series.

What we fail to realize is that for the majority of history, slavery was a sad but accepted institution.

It wasn't till modern times and the influence of the Christian view of man that slavery was seen as unjust and abusive.

Skeptics and critics of Christianity have often attacked the NT on the basis that if it supposed to present such a high and lofty moral rule, why isn't it more strident in its rebuke and criticism of slavery.

Why don't Paul and the other Apostles use their position and influence to speak out against it?

What these critics are doing is really an argument *against* their own position.

You see, the world of Paul's day frankly could not conceive a society without slavery.

It was so pervasive, so much a part of the social fabric and economic base of the world that dispensing with it would have been as reasonable as dispensing with money.

It is only from their modern world view which judges slavery as unjust and immoral that they then look back in judgment.

But history shows that it is the Gospel itself which has framed the modern mind to see slavery as unjust and immoral.

It was the gospel and the gospel alone which saw all men as equal and created in the image of God and so endowed by their Creator with dignity and possessing certain unalienable rights.

Without realizing it, the critic of Christianity has had his own sensibilities shaped by Christianity.

Paul and the other disciples knew they could not attack slavery directly.

It would have upset the social order.

So instead, they attacked the sin that fostered bigotry and prejudice.

They sought to replace hatred and racism with love and servanthood.

It was as these virtues replaced vice that men and societies were changed.

By telling slaves to obey their masters and to work as to the Lord and not to men, and then telling masters to be fair in their treatment of their servants, Paul was laying the foundation and framework for the eventual end of slavery.

If he had railed against slavery, he would have been disregarded as a kook and we never would have heard from him.

If Christianity had been allowed to become identified as an anti-slavery movement early in its history, it never would have succeeded in bringing a virtual end to slavery in the modern world.

If you want to see the game plan that Paul had for ending slavery, read *Philemon*. Philemon was a Christian master who had a slave named *Onesimus*, who had run away.

While on the lam, he had overheard Paul's preaching and had become a believer and assistant to Paul.

Onesimus realized he needed to return to his master Philemon, so Paul sent him back with a letter giving instructions to Philemon on how he should treat his run-away slave.

There were approximately 60 million slaves when Paul wrote this, 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. [\[1\]](#)

Paul bases his call for masters to treat their servants fairly on the fact that these people have a Master over them – Jesus!

Just as each of them would judge a servant on the basis of his or her work, so they will be judged on their treatment of others, including their servants.

If you are in a position of authority and oversight on your job – keep in mind that just as you want those you are supervising to do a good job, so the Lord wants you to do a good job in overseeing.

You look for productivity on the part of your employees - but what God looks at is the way you treat others.

He doesn't care too awfully much about Frisbee – but He does care deeply about Frisbee makers!

If you're a Frisbee maker supervisor – then be good to those Frisbee makers!

Now Paul turns to speak more generally about how we are to conduct ourselves as

believers.

In vs. 2-6, he deals with the topic of our *conversation*.

- 2 **Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;**
- 3 **meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,**
- 4 **that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.**

First Paul speaks about our speech as it's directed toward God.

He says we ought to pray continually and earnestly!

Some translations render it this way – “Be devoted in prayer.”

The idea is *persistence*.

Jesus told a story about a widow who got what she wanted from a lousy judge, simply because she hammered him daily for a long time.

Finally he gave in just to get rid of her.

Luke explained that Jesus told that story as a way to teach the disciples to be persistent in prayer and not to give up.

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “Pray without ceasing.”

Now, does this mean you and I are to walk around, every waking moment of the day and night, engaged in the same kind of fervent prayer we do when we are alone in the privacy of our homes and prayer closets?

They have a place for people who do that – and all the doors lock from the outside! [\[2\]](#)

Praying continually is not so much an issue of always talking out loud to God with eyes closed, head bowed and fingers steepled in the classic posture of prayer.

This kind of prayer is not so much about speaking words as it is the posture of the heart.

What is prayer but communication with God?

And as we all know, communication does not always involve talk – at least half of communication is listening!

Continual, persistent prayer means simply to abide in the conscious presence of God.

It means that one's heart is in a posture of constant contact with the Lord.

You never forget or lose sight of the fact that he is here, right now, listening, speaking, loving, and directing.

It means to lay your head on His breast, and stay there, no matter where you are or what you're doing.

When he says we are to be “vigilant in [prayer] with thanksgiving” he means that we are to look at all of life through spiritual eyes rather than from a mere earthly-bound perspective.

Listen – this world is a moral and spiritual minefield!

If we aren't careful, if we are vigilant, we could find ourselves being blown

apart.
While we're vigilant, awake and cautious, we also need to maintain an attitude of thankfulness.
And here's why – if vigilance isn't coupled with a rejoicing heart, then vigilance can quickly turn in to paranoia.
I have known many believers who were so mindful, so aware of all the evil in the world and so fearful of it, they had no joy and began to get a emotionally unbalanced.
Yes this world is a dangerous place – but Christ has overcome the world and we are complete in Him.
As we carefully thread our way across the minefield of this world, we sing a happy tune – {The hills are alive, with the Sound of Music}.
Paul then asks them to pray for him – that even though he is under arrest in Rome, his work as an apostle will not be hindered.

Friends, we simply cannot calculate the power of prayer is it relates to the ministry of preaching and teaching.
Paul asked them to pray for him and his ministry because he knew their prayers made an eternal difference!
You may not be on some foreign mission field – but you can pray for missionaries, and your prayers will couple with their presence and work to be a powerful one-two punch that will send the enemy reeling and the borders of the Kingdom of God deeper into enemy-held territory.

Just as Paul asked for their prayers – I ask you to pray for our missionaries that are in the field and those preparing to go.
Jim Gately in Chile
The Speights in Thailand
The Shockleys In Maneadero, Mexico
Roman Gorlov & Slava Behreznev in Russia
Then also – please pray for me.
How I long that my words would not be with the wisdom of man but with the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.
[Praying during Sunday Services]

Note what Paul asked for from them in prayer in v. 4.
He asked them to prayer for his ability to make the mystery of Christ *manifest*.
That word would be better understood as “*clearly!*”
Paul asked for the gift of making things *clear*.
One old adage goes – if there is a mist in the pulpit, there will be a fog in the pew.
It ought ever be the aim of the preacher and teacher to make things simple – not simplistic, but simple.
Jesus said, “Feed My sheep” not “Confuse My Theologians.”
Spurgeon once commented, “Christ said, ‘Feed My sheep . . . Feed My lambs.’ Some preachers, however, put the food so high that neither sheep nor lambs can reach it. They seem to have read the text, ‘Feed My giraffes.’”

By asking them to pray for him and his preaching to be clear, he recognized the power of prayer to affect those who *hear*, as well as those who *speak*.

Now Paul turns to talk about our conversation with the World.

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

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

Since these are the verses I will be using as the text for this Sunday's message, I'll leave most of my comment till then, but let me just cover them with this . . .

We need to be thoughtful about the way we live before the eyes of the lost.

Many Christians isolate themselves in their own self-imposed sub-cultural ghetto and rarely if ever have any kind of meaningful relationship with unbelievers.

I don't think this is what Jesus intended for us.

Look at His own life for instance.

What we ought to do is live so well, so excellently before the lost and in relationship with them that it draws people to the Lord.

We'll get in to more depth on that this Sunday.

Now Paul turns to the conclusion of the letter . . .

7 Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.

8 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts,

9 with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one of you*. They will make known to you all things which *are happening here*.

It seems that Epaphras, the pastor of Colosse, and the one who had come to Paul with news about what was happening there, had decided to stay for a while in Rome.

So Paul sent Tychicus and Onesimus back with this letter.

They would fill the Colossians in on all that was happening to Paul and Epaphras in Rome.

As we come to the end of the letter and begin to read the list of names that Paul tacks on the end, we might be tempted to pass over this briefly and try to get home a little earlier tonight.

But if we did, then we would miss a blessing.

You see, there is richness even here, in what appears to be little more than a casual conclusion to a letter.

The Holy Spirit is still at work . . .

Paul mentions Tychicus.

Five times he is mentioned in the scripture.

The first is in Ephesus, where it appears that he was won to faith at the end of Paul's three year ministry there.

Paul had had to flee Ephesus because of a murderous riot raised by the

pagans of the City in opposition to Paul.

It seems that Tychicus had been one of those who had fled with him when he left because just a short time later, we find him as one of Paul's 7 companions on the trip to Jerusalem where he was arrested and eventually sent to Rome.

He accompanied Paul to his imprisonment in Caesarea and attended him during his entire stay there.

Then when Paul appealed to Caesar, Tychicus was one of his traveling companions.

As Paul's companion from Ephesus all the way to Rome, think about some of what he endured as he demonstrated his devotion to the Lord and his loyalty to Paul:

He was exposed to

- The danger of a murderous mob in Ephesus
- The danger of another murderous mob in the temple of Jerusalem
- Many long months of waiting while Paul sat in prison in Caesarea.
- The arduous sea trip to Rome in which they suffered shipwreck and near drowning
- Being marooned on Crete
- Then finally, arriving in Rome, spending more months of waiting while Paul was in prison

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul gives a list of all the deprivations and hard trials he had endured for the sake of Christ – Tychicus had been by his side for a good part of them.

Here Paul calls him his beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant of Christ.

Because of his faithfulness, Paul entrusts him with a sacred charge, to take this letter to the Colossians.

From what we see of Tychicus in other passages, we can safely conclude he probably didn't really want this task.

He wanted to stay close to Paul and minister to his needs.

But he takes the charge that's given to him and faithfully discharges it.

Why? Because he was a faithful and loyal man.

When we think of the great men of the NT, we think of Paul and Peter and John and James.

Who would ever think of Tychicus?

But tell me, what good would Paul's letter to the Colossians have been if it had never been delivered?

Tell me – what was the name of Charles Lindbergh's mechanic?

Who blocked for OJ Simpson when he won the Heisman Trophy? ^[3]

It is man and his petty view of history that sees only a handful of names elevated to greatness.

But from God's eternal perspective and in the chronicles of heaven, even the smallest things, when done out of devotion to God and loyalty in His name

that are accounted great!

Your name may never make the evening news – but your faithfulness at home and work is building an eternal kingdom.

Quite frankly – there are not little or inconsequential acts or lives – not if they are lived for the glory of God.

And then there is Onesimus – the runaway slave.

Once he receives Christ, he realizes he has to make the past broken relationships of his life right.

So he determines to return home and put himself back under the ownership of his Christian master, Philemon.

A hard thing – but the right thing nonetheless.

Some years ago the following ad appeared in a newspaper in Nairobi, Kenya.

“All Debts to be Paid.

I Allan Harangui, alias Waniek Harangui, or PO Box 40380, Nairobi, have dedicated my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I must put right all my wrongs. If I owe you any debt or damage personally or any of the companies I have been director of partner of . . .

(then some companies are named)

Please contact me or my advocates for a settlement. No amount will be disputed.

God and His Son Jesus Christ be glorified.”^[4]

Friends, this is evidence, irrefutable evidence of the power of God to change a life and make it new.

Myra Brooks Welch told the story of an auction and an old, battered violin that was offered.

The auctioneer himself thought it not worth the time to offer and indeed the audience agreed for the final bid was a paltry \$3.

Just before he closed the sale, a gray-haired man rose from the back and walked forward.

He took the violin out of the auctioneer’s hand, tuned it, tightened the bow, and then set the bow to the strings.

The sound that came out was a sweet as the voice of an angel.

When the music stopped, the auctioneer, with a voice very much changed, said, “what am I bid for this old violin?”

And instead of \$3, it went for \$3,000!”

Welch wrote,

*The people cheered, but some of them cried,
“We do not quite understand –
What changed its worthy?”
The man replied,
“The touch of the Master’s Hand.”
And many a man with a life out of tune,*

*And battered and torn with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd.
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He's going once and going twice,
He's going – and almost gone.
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul, and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's Hand."*

Tychicus and Onesimus are just two examples of the truth of that wonderful story.

- 10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),**
- 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.**

Three of Paul's assistants, friends, and fellow Jews in Rome sent their greetings to the Colossians.

Like Tychicus, Aristarchus was one who had been by Paul's side throughout much of his ministry and had endured many of the same trials Paul did.

Mark is of course the author of the gospel that bears his name.

Jesus Justus we know nothing about.

The name Jesus was a common name - Joshua

Joshua his Jewish name, while *Justus* was his roman name

- 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.**
- 13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.**

As I've already mentioned, Epaphras seems to have been the pastor there in Colosse.

But being concerned with the challenge Gnosticism was presenting, he went to Rome to get Paul's guidance.

His diligence to pray for the Colossians was evidence of his pastoral call to care for the flock of God.

He was separated from them by geography but not in spirit and attempted to make up for his absence by praying diligently for them.

- 14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.**

Just as Aristarchus, Mark and Justus were Jews attending Paul in Rome, here two Gentiles are mentioned – Luke, the author of the gospel and Acts, and Demas.

- 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.**

Laodicea, Colosse, and Hierapolis were three cities that all shared the same valley, with Colosse being the runt of the litter.

Each city had its own church – and here the church and pastor of Laodicea are mentioned.

16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

17 And say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.”

Along with the letter to the Colossian church, Paul had penned a letter to the Laodicean church, though it has been lost to us.

Paul desired that each church have a chance to read the other’s letter.

One message is of extra import – Archippus needs to be reminded to fulfill what the Lord had called him to.

What that was we don’t know – and it’s unimportant – the point is – he needed to be busy doing it and not something else.

From Philemon 2, we can conclude that Archippus was a part of his household and may have been Philemon’s son.

From the importance Paul puts on writing a letter to Philemon, it seems that the church may have used his house as their meeting place and Archippus may have been their pastor.

But notice who Paul is writing this to – the church at Colosse; in other words, all of them were to encourage Archippus to stay faithful to his calling.

I love the picture this presents, if indeed Archippus was a pastor.

This is a call for the people to encourage the pastor to stay faithful to his calling by the Lord, not the expectations of the people.

Wouldn’t that be wonderful if every congregation constantly encouraged their pastors to seek God, discover His will, and then lead, feed, and protect the flock?

Let me echo what Paul says here, but say it to you!

“Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord – do it!”

18 This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

Paul usually dictated his letters to a secretary, but would sign them with his own hand.

They always end with words of benediction containing grace.

His signature coupled with “grace” was a kind of seal of authenticity that this was indeed from the Apostle.

At the conclusion of his letters, Paul often asked them to remember his chains.

Why?

They were a reminder of his love for lost souls, especially the Gentiles.

Hebrews 13:3 says, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.”

Even though the letter ends with seemingly uninspired personal business, even this bears evidence of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
I find it fascinating that Paul has his distinctive style of writing.
It's different from Peter.
And James is even more different.
Luke doesn't write like Paul, James, or Peter.
John is unique.
Each of the authors of the NT can be discerned by their grammar, their vocabulary and by the themes they repeat.
Yet throughout each of the books of the NT, there is the unmistakable ring of divine inspiration.
This evidence of inspiration was one of the tests the early church fathers used in deciding what books would make the canon of scripture.
They rejected certain books because they lacked this evidence of inspiration.
We even read about one of them tonight – the letter to the church at Laodicea.
Though written by Paul, it didn't make the grade.

How this encourages me is in this . . .

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean the end of individuality
God doesn't save us to turn us into a bunch of religious clones.
Being a Christian isn't about all wearing the same approved set of clothes, or carrying the same bible translation, or all cutting our hair the same way.
Jesus died and rose again to save us from sin and to make us more the **US** God originally created us to be.
Paul was still Paul when he dictated Colossians and Romans and Ephesians.
His head didn't snap back and he didn't go in to some kind of trance when the Holy Spirit came on him and he spoke or wrote.
John didn't spirit write.
James' eyes didn't roll to the back of his head.
They were still who they were – it's just that the Holy Spirit moved them.
When God comes on us in power – He doesn't force us or violate our will by controlling us.
Rather, He *enables* us.
He takes up all we are, and uses us without that use every spilling over into control or force.

God wants to use you!

He wants to empower you with His presence, with the Holy Spirit, and take up your individuality and fill it out so you are complete in Christ.
That's what Colossians has been about – you are complete in Christ – you don't need anything else.
Friend, be cautious of any teaching that says Jesus isn't enough.

[1] Wiersbe, Warren

[2] Hughes, R. Kent pg. 136

[3] Hughes, pg. 144

[4] Hughes, pg. 145