

Colossians 4:2-18 Relationships Inside and Outside the Church.

Some would say that if God loves everyone, then everyone will be saved. They would contend that it is unloving to say that some are saved and some are lost – that if we believe such things, we cannot love people. We know that we're supposed to love others, but how does that love look in different situations. What if someone simply doesn't know Christ? In this passage, Paul touches on relationships both inside and outside the church. He'll show us that all of these relationships are important, but they are not all the same.

- I. Keep up a good witness to those outside of Christ 4:2-6
- II. Be an encouragement to those who are in Christ 4:7-18

In every relationship that we have we are to be either a witness or an encouragement.

- I. Keep up a good witness to those outside of Christ 4:2-6
- 4:2 Every Christian can have a ministry of prayer. Prayer can seem like a lot of work especially when God delays His answers. **Continue earnestly** in prayer. Don't give up. Keep praying.

1 Thess. 5:17 NKJV *pray without ceasing*

In addition to regular set prayer times we should offer up spontaneous prayers all throughout the day.

We should also be both vigilant and thankful as we pray. To be vigilant is to be watchful, or to stay alert as we pray. Remember the disciples kept falling asleep when Jesus asked them to stay alert as He prayed. We can easily be prone to the same thing. Nothing puts some people to sleep faster than a good prayer time.

- 4:3-4 Paul asks for prayer for his own ministry. It's not selfish to ask for prayer in this way; it's an acknowledgment that God has to be the power behind the work. Paul was in chains, but was still concerned to have the prayer support he needed to keep doing the Lord's work.

Every ministry needs prayer. Prayer should be the driving force behind the work of evangelism – and evangelism should be a constant component of the ministry of any church. As long as there are lost people, there will be a need to share the love of Jesus Christ. This prayer request by Paul is motivated by a deep love and concern for the lost – those who don't know Jesus.

- 4:5 **redeeming the time** Here it is in the NLT

Colossians 4:5 NLT *Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.*

Some people will only be able to see Christ through us. We need to give those relationships the priority they deserve.

Ephesians 5:15-16 NKJV ¹⁵*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,* ¹⁶*redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

4:6 Jesus called his disciples to be “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). In speech this suggests conversation that is interesting, stimulating, and wise.

Notice this: Paul's comments assume that the Colossian believers are vitally involved in the local community interacting with people in a way that would arouse interest in the gospel.

First Peter 3:15-16 ESV ¹⁵but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

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II. Be an encouragement to those who are in Christ 4:7-18

4:7-8 **Tychicus** was a native of Asia Minor, the region around Colossae, who became a Christian and a member of Paul's ministry team (Acts 20:4). He will carry this letter (as well as Ephesians and Philemon; see Eph. 6:21–22; and Introduction to Philemon: Date) and bring them news about Paul and his situation.

4:9 **Onesimus** was a slave who had run away from Colossae and met Paul in Rome where he was converted. (See Philemon). Paul makes no reference to his being a slave; he only refers to him as **a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you [a Colossian]**. The cross is the great equalizer. Paul was equally happy to minister to governors, kings, soldiers or slaves.

4:10 **Aristarchus** was from Thessalonica and had accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. He had been arrested during the riot in Ephesus along with Gaius (Acts 19:29). Aristarchus had travelled to Rome with Paul. It's not clear that he was literally a prisoner with Paul at this time or if Paul just uses that term about him because of his faithful companionship.

We may remember **Mark** from Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas. He went along as their assistant, but left them before the trip was half over and went back home. For that reason, Paul didn't want to take him on the second trip so Mark went with Barnabas and Paul took Silas. By this time Mark had matured into a faithful part of the ministry. The Gospel of Mark is his contribution to the NT.

4:11 **Jesus** and **Justus** were both fairly common names among the Jews. Jesus was the equivalent of Joshua and Justus was a Latin name meaning “just” or “righteous.”

4:12-13 **Epaphras** was mentioned in 1:7. He was from Colossae and probably started the church through his preaching and teaching before he went to Rome to be with Paul.

- Prayer, especially for the Colossians, now seems to be one of his primary ministries.
- His primary request was that the Colossian believers would be:
 - Perfect – mature or full-grown, not lacking in any necessary quality
 - Complete – full, accomplished, “fully assured” (ESV & NIV) in all of God's will.

Laodicea and Hierapolis were nearby towns in the same river valley as Colossae.

4:14 **Luke** was a doctor and a beloved one at that. It's hard to understand why some Christian groups are opposed to the medical profession. **Demas** later abandoned Paul.

2 Tim 4:10 NKJV *Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world ...*

Spiritual strength comes from relying upon God. Beware of overconfidence.

1 Cor 10:12-13 NKJV ¹²*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* ¹³*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

4:15 **Nymphas ... his / Nympha ... her** Most of the Greek manuscripts have Nymphas as a man. The oldest texts have her as Nympha, a woman. Bibles will differ here. This person is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. Either way, he or she owned a house, probably in Laodicea where the church met for worship and teaching.

Sometimes people speak glibly of discrepancies in the Bible. This is an example of the kind that we find – the kind that doesn't make any difference.

4:16 **the epistle from Laodicea** This letter seems to have been lost. It could be the Letter to the Ephesians. Not all manuscript copies of Ephesians say "to the Ephesians," there simply isn't a church named on the others. Therefore, many believe it was intended from the beginning to be circular – the same text given to several churches, with Ephesus being the first. Again, it could also be that this letter to Laodicea has simply been lost.

Regardless, it's clear that Paul's letters had Scriptural authority right from the beginning. Sometimes people make it sound as if NT documents were compiled by some sort of capricious or biased decision at a late date. The truth is rather that there was not much controversy at the time at all, but that no decision was really needed until a later date after a number of fraudulent letters began to appear. The scholar F.F. Bruce put it like this:

It is specially important to hear in mind that the fixing of the New Testament Canon was not the arbitrary work of a Church Council. When at last, in A.D. 393, a Church Council drew up a list of New Testament books, it simply confirmed the canonical recognition that was already well established as the general consensus of Christians.

(http://www.holyfear.net/pdf/bruce/canon_bruce.pdf)

4:17 **Archippus** may have been the son of Philemon and Apphia (see Philem. 2) and the pastor or leading elder of the Colossian church.

4:18 Paul ends his letter by asking the Colossian Christians to remember him before the Lord. "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand." Timothy, mentioned in 1:1, has so far probably been functioning as Paul's secretary. Paul now may have taken the stylus and signed the letter personally (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; 2 Thess. 3:17).

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Conclusions:

1. Every Christian can have a ministry of prayer.
 - a. Two things to remember as we pray:
 - i. Be watchful or vigilant. Stay alert.
 - ii. Be thankful
 - b. Three items to pray for:
 - i. The ministries of the church
 - ii. Those who do the ministry
 - iii. Outreach to the lost – for open doors for the word
 - All the people of the church – that we would stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.
2. To those outside the church we need to “redeem the time”, that is use the time that God gives us as wisely as we possibly can.
 - a. If we genuinely love people, then our greatest longing will be to see them saved.
 - b. Paul emphasizes two things to consider regarding our witness to those outside of Christ:
 - i. **our walk** (v.5) – that is, our behavior
 - ii. **our speech** (v.6) – that it be gracious and “seasoned with salt,” which I would take to mean interesting enough to encourage further dialogue.
 - Both our behavior and our speech need to be considered if our witness to an unbelieving world can have any hope of being effective.
3. Look at all the mutually encouraging relationships Paul had with other believers. There were:
 - a. Those, like Tychicus, who served faithfully with Paul.
 - b. Those, like Jesus and Justus, who were fellow workers with Paul for the kingdom of God
 - c. Those, like Nymphas who opened their homes for the church to meet
 - d. Those, like Epaphras who prayed fervently
 - e. Those, like Luke, who used their professional skills to be a blessing to others.
 - f. **Certainly we could find many more examples like these.** The point, however, is that we consider our part in the body of Christ, what we do and how we are serving Him, whether as a witness to outsiders or to others within the family of believers in Jesus Christ.
4. The main theme of this letter has been **The Supremacy of Jesus Christ.**
 - a. We should consider how much our faith is focused on Jesus compared with how much it is focused on ourselves or what we get out of it.
 - b. Never buy into a form of Christianity that draws attention away from Jesus Christ.
 - c. Christ has saved us, and we dare not minimize that fact, but we need to remember that He has saved us in order to bring glory to Him.

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