

Study in Colossians

Session 8

In the last section of Scripture Paul outlined some of the virtues which were to be “put on” by believers. These character traits were given as the natural result of a life indwelt by the Holy Spirit and yielded to Christ. Now, Paul moves to more general matters of final importance for the church at Colossae and then gives commendations and then closes with some personal remarks.

I. The hidden life and the visible life of the believer.

A. Here in the final teaching segment of this letter, Paul gives the two extremes of the Christian life. The first is the hidden or invisible aspect of our life in Christ and the second is the outward or visible aspect of our life in Christ. He begins with the internal, hidden aspect.

1. **[Read Colossians 4:2-4]**

2. Believers are to devote themselves to prayer.

a. The word translated “devote yourselves” is used 10 times in the New Testament with various shades of meaning - “continue”, “continue steadfastly”, etc. The root word means to “be strong” and always connotes earnest adherence to a person or things - in this case a zealous adherence to prayer. Believers are to persist with fervor in prayer.

b. “being watchful” - “keeping awake” suggests a constant spiritual alertness. While praying our minds should be careful and actively participating in the prayers, to pray in a sense of being alive in your prayers to what God is leading you to pray for so that your prayer life isn’t mechanical, lazy or dull. If you are listening and open to the Spirit of God at work in you while you pray, then you’re following this instruction. He guides you in what and how to pray.

c. Like we saw last week, thanksgiving is the attitude by which our prayers are offered to the Lord. If you want to maintain your zeal for prayer, do it from a heart of thanksgiving.

3. Paul then asks the Colossian church to remember him and his associates in their prayers. While Paul and his fellow workers for the gospel are imprisoned in Rome, he wants the church to be praying that God will open doors of opportunity for them to witness to those around them.

a. Paul wants to share the mystery of Christ. This mystery of Christ which is the gospel was in opposition to the mystery knowledge of the Gnostics.

b. The motive for this prayer was for the spread of the gospel, not for Paul’s own well-being. He didn’t ask for God’s blessings upon himself but only that the kingdom of God would be proclaimed through him as he was still in prison in Rome for sharing the gospel among the Gentiles. He wants to share this message in a worthy manner.

B. The external, visible aspect of the Christian life is mentioned next.

1. **[Read Colossians 4:5-6]**

2. These two verses give us how Christians are to conduct themselves in an unbelieving society. At this time in Roman history, the initial pangs of persecution were starting to close in on Christians, as the so-called sect of Judaism was gaining in notoriety. As with any long-term persecution, it begins with false accusations and dismissal of the lives who proclaim the new faith, in this case Christianity. So with false accusations being hurled at believers, it was more important than ever that the church members lived in an exemplary manner so that such

accusations would be clearly seen as false by any neutral, honest observer. In these verses Paul makes two appeals - one to how the Christian is to live and the other as to how the Christian is to speak. The driving motive for the believer is to more effectively spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

a. Believers are to be tactful with their dealings with people outside the church body. They need to avoid needlessly antagonizing or alienating their pagan neighbors. In a positive sense, believers are to live in a way which will attract, impress and convict their lost neighbors and give a favorable impression of Christ.

b. “make the most of the opportunity” - is a market term. It means to “buy out” or “purchase completely”. It is like going into a grocery store and buying all the cans of a certain item that is there. In practical terms, Christians are to buy up every opportunity to share the gospel with outsiders. We are to, through the outworking of practical wisdom, make every opportunity to share the gospel.

c. “opportunity” - “kairos” - it is one of the two words in Greek that often gets translated “time” but it doesn’t mean the measurement of time or the duration of time but rather it suggests a certain point in time, an opportunity or moment of importance in time. (In Galatians 4:4 - it means “fulness of time” speaking of Christ’s birth)

3. Christians are not only to live in such a way as to further the gospel and take advantage of every opportunity to share the gospel message by their lives, they are also to speak about the gospel in such a way as to present it effectively and attractively.

a. Our speech is to be “full of grace”. Grace in this verse should not be taken in the technical sense of the word but rather the general sense of the word - “pleasantness” or “charming” or “attractive”.

b. “salt” - it gives appealing flavor to food - our words should give appealing flavor to the gospel truth. A bland, doctrinal truth may not be received well whereas a flavorful, fresh view of that same truth may warrant the lost person to think about the gospel in new and positive terms.

c. Our conversation is to be appropriate for each person we encounter. Taking a one-size-fits-all approach to sharing the gospel verbally won’t work. The Spirit who knows the hearts of those He arranges our divine appointments with, knows how to instruct us in each encounter.

C. This completes the body of the letter to the Colossian church. Paul has met head-on the false teachers and his portrait of Christ and the Christian life is now full. Now all that remains is to address some personal matters.

II. Paul commends two men. [Read Colossians 4:7-9]

A. The two men Paul commends to the Colossians are Tychicus and Onesimus.

1. Paul lauds Tychicus with three different titles that tell us a great deal about the man. This man was the one who, more than likely, delivered this letter and the letter to the Ephesians.

a. “beloved brother” - He was a fellow Christian who Paul and his associated loved.

b. “faithful servant” - He was a loyal servant of Christ but also of Paul. This could be translated “trusted assistant”.

c. “fellow bond-servant” - Like Paul, Tychicus was a bond-servant of the Lord Jesus. It signifies a comradeship with Paul and his fellow faithful gospel workers.

d. Paul sent Tychicus to them for two reasons: to tell them about Paul's circumstances and that Tychicus could encourage their hearts. This is another commendation of huge proportions. Paul knew that he was imprisoned yet, Tychicus, by his presence, would be able to encourage the Colossian believers.

2. The other man commended was Onesimus. Onesimus was the escaped slave who ran into Paul in Rome and got saved. Paul is now sending Onesimus back to Colossae - with no mention of his past - but only the heart-warming phrase that he is now one of them.

a. Notice this run-away slave is now a faithful and beloved brother in Christ.

b. He will also be responsible for sharing with the church some of Paul's situation in Rome. (What is interesting is that Paul doesn't mention Onesimus' past to the entire church but he does write a private letter to Philemon, Onesimus's former master.)

III. Final greetings. [Read Colossians 4:10-18]

A. There are six people, fellow workers of Paul, who send greetings to the church at Colossae.

1. Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus were Jewish men who worked with Paul.

a. Aristarchus was a fellow prisoner. He was a native of Thessalonica and was arrested at the time of the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and later was on the journey from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:2). He was a fellow prisoner which could be figurative or literal but given the times he was with Paul was probably literal.

b. Mark - we know the most about Mark of any of these three. He was the cousin of Barnabas, the man who sought out Paul and brought him to Antioch to serve the Lord there. Mark wrote the gospel of Mark and was Peter's disciple. Notice that the believers in Colossae were given instructions on how to treat him, if he came with these other men. If you recall, Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. When it came time for the second journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along with them but Paul was fearful that he'd desert them again. It was such a sticking point that Paul and Barnabas split up and went to different places. However, in time, Paul changed his tune on Mark as he obviously matured in the faith and willingness to suffer for the sake of the gospel because in II Timothy 4:11 Paul says to bring Mark to him as he is useful for the ministry. Sometimes it's important to re-evaluate people and not leave them stuck in an opinion of them based on only one or an early evaluation of them.

c. Jesus Justus - this is the only reference to him in the Bible. We don't know anything else about him other than he is a Jew who was with Paul in Rome as he wrote this letter. He may have been known to the Colossians but that is conjecture.

d. These three are "of the circumcision" - in other words - they are the only Jews with Paul in Rome and are encouraging him. You can hear the alienation Paul is feeling concerning this fellow countrymen. Out of everyone he's worked with, only three of them are Jews.

e. "comfort" - only time in New Testament this word is used. It means "comfort in the relief of pain". We get our word "paregoric" from this word. Paul may have faced a crisis and it seems that they stood with him during this crisis and it offered him comfort from some sort of pain. "stood" is aorist meaning they stood with him in the past but that standing gave him comfort then and the comfort continues to the time of writing this note.

2. There were a number of Gentiles also working with Paul who want to greet the Colossian church.

a. Epaphras (v.12) is the first one. This is natural since he is the founder of the church

and Paul's personal representative to this church. He is a local of Colossae and Paul reminds the church that he continually wrestled for the church in his prayers. His concern was that they could stand firm and mature in their faith in relation to God's will. Paul related Ephaphras's deep concern for their church as well as their sister churches in Hierapolis and Laodicea (both in close proximity to Colossae).

b. Luke - Luke was a Gentile who accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys. This is the Luke that wrote both Luke and Acts. If we didn't have this verse, we would never have known that Luke was a physician. From this and other passages, we learn that Luke was not only a trusted fellow bond-servant of Jesus but also a close personal friend of Paul.

c. Demas is the last man to give a greeting to the Colossians. No description is given of Demas. In I Timothy 4:10 Paul speaks of Demas as having deserted his band of missionaries and headed to Thessalonica independently of them. This happened later in Paul's ministry.

B. Lastly, Paul give final instructions on who he'd like for the Colossians to greet and what he wants done with this letter.

1. The brothers are Laodicea were to be greeted.

2. The church that met in the house of Nympha was to be greeted. There is some dispute over whether the name is masculine or feminine. The strongest earliest evidence is that it is feminine but due to the large bulk of contradictory early manuscripts, it's best not to get too bogged down in this matter. The important thing is that the church is the body of believers - not the building.

3. This letter to the Colossians is to be read to the church at Laodicea but also they are to read the letter Paul wrote to that church. The letter of Paul to Laodicea did not survive.

4. Archippus received a ministry to the church, he was called and commissioned to serve the church there and now Paul is admonishing him to fulfill that ministry.

5. Paul wrote this last part of the letter with his own hand. It was uncommon that Paul actually wrote down his own letters. He dictated them to another. However, it was common for Paul to write the end of the letter himself and he seems to have had unique handwriting as he mentions. He wants the Colossians to know he personally considers them part of the kingdom and worthy of the personal touch of his ministry. He wants them to remember his imprisonment as well as know that he wishes God's grace to be with them. Paul ends this letter with the foundation of his ministry - grace.

Q: Any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?