

### ***Introduction...***

This is the 24<sup>th</sup> week of our study in the book of Colossians and next week we will wrap up this study. But this morning we are going to see Paul begin to bring the letter to a close.

The book of Colossians is one of the shortest of Paul's letters but it is also one of the most exciting because in this letter Paul is writing to a young church that is just discovering what it means to be Christians, what it means to trust in and follow Christ, and they are learning how their newfound faith interacts with the philosophies of the culture around them. The main theme of this book is the gospel Jesus Christ. The good news of how God sent His Son to save us from our sin by dying on the cross in our place and being raised from the dead to seal our forgiveness.

Now you might be thinking, "Why does Paul want to write a letter to a church filled with believers and teach them about something they already know and believe?" For two reasons: **1. Is that we never graduate up from our need to understand and appreciate the gospel.** The fact that God loves us and saves us by His grace alone not only forms our identity as Christians but it also forms the basis of our motivation to love and serve God. We don't obey so that God will save us, we obey because He has saved us.

**2. Paul makes the gospel the theme of this letter because within this small church the gospel has come under attack.** Paul is writing this letter is to warn and protect this church from false teaching that had crept its way into this brand new baby church.

You see, there is a group of people who are teaching things that aren't true and Paul is writing this letter to help the church sort through what they are hearing. This group is saying that in addition to Jesus we need to add a whole host of religious rituals and practices to our lives in order to be acceptable to God. But Paul wants the church to know the truth that Christ is more than enough. So he writes this letter to help them sort through what is true and what is false.

### ***Transition...***

Over the last 24 weeks we have been learning the truth about who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish. We have learned how the gospel affects all of our relationships from God Himself all the way down to our neighbors. But here at the end we are going to see things come down to the very basics of how we live our day to day life. He has taken us on a journey from the eternal being of Christ all the way down here to the way we live each day as followers of Christ.

**This morning we are going to see 4 daily rhythms that should mark our lives as Christians.**

**Col 4:2 *Continue steadfastly in prayer***, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

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

### ***Sermon Focus...***

There are really two main verbs in this section and they are: Pray and Walk. These are the imperatives that Paul wants us to see as part of our daily lives as Christians. But the other parts are meant to help us to more clearly and thoroughly understand how our prayers and our behavior are to be directed. This final section is intended to be very simple and very practical. This is what our day to day life as a Christian should look like.

### **I. Devote Yourself to Prayer (v. 2)**

**Col 4:2 *Continue steadfastly in prayer***, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

**Question:** Can anyone remember how many times you've become frustrated this past week because you are in a hurry and everybody around you seems to be on vacation? How many times have you become frustrated because someone was driving too slow in the passing lane? Or how many times have you become frustrated and impatient with someone who couldn't make his or her mind up at the coffee shop, or a restaurant?

In the summer time one of the things our family has learned to do to try and cope with the Texas heat is to get out of the house together and go to an indoor mall. This gives us the chance to get away together; people watch a little bit and enjoy someone else's cold air. But sometimes walking in the mall becomes a source frustration for me that I am ***sure*** each of you can identify with. You know when you are in a place and you can see in the distance a store that you want to get to, but in front of you is a family of 4-5 people who are spread out taking up the whole aisle and they are walking so slow that they might as well be standing still.

Don't people realize that they are being rude and that they are taking up the whole walkway? Don't they realize that they are being self-absorbed by not focusing on my need

to get around them? Don't they realize that their conversation is not nearly as important to me as it is to them?

**This happens to me all the time and then something else happens to me.** I realize that all the accusations that are running through my head about these insensitive and selfish people are actually the way that I am acting about them. I'm the self-absorbed person who thinks my needs come before everyone else. I'm the one being rude staring down my nose at people who are just having a good time together. My biggest problem in that moment is not the group of people in front of me, it's the self-absorbed jerk inside of me that's the problem. And often I am too busy to realize it before it happens.

**My guess is that I'm not alone.** We get so caught up in the frantic pace of American life that we don't slow down and focus our attention on what really matters. There is always a deadline in front of us and even when we should be relaxing we are still working. About a quarter of all vacationers say they check their voice and email while on vacation. Many others refuse to take vacation because of the fear of the pile up that will be waiting on them when they get back. We live at a pace that makes us think we are on a deadline even when we're not.

The technology in our hand keeps us from slowing down because every couple of minutes we get that ***critically important notification*** that ***somebody actually liked something***. Our inbox is a constant reminder that we have a lot of things to respond to and very little time to get it done. Meetings fill our calendars, responsibilities at work, at home, at church, to our neighbors, etc.

Our hearts are filled with attitudes and motivations that want to put our needs in front of the needs of others. The pace of our lives is relentless. The demand on our attention is constant and ever growing. Our responsibilities seem to be limitless. And the question is what is our antidote to all this stress, noise, obligations, deadlines and busyness?

*"The pace of an industrialized America whispers insistently to all of us every day, 'Hurry up!'"*<sup>1</sup>

But prayer is God's way of inviting us and commanding us to slow down.

**"Slow down and pray."** Let me give you a couple of examples of this from the life of Jesus.

**Mark 1:35** And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

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<sup>1</sup> Jared Wilson, *Abide* pg. 37

**Luke 5:15** But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. <sup>16</sup> But he would often withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Over and over, we see in Jesus' life that the demands on his time are growing but He withdraws from all the demands and busyness ***in order to pray?*** ***Does it surprise us that Jesus withdraws from the crowds to pray?***

I don't know all the reasons why Jesus prayed so much, even in the face of great demands but we can probably put together a short list:

1. Jesus prayed this way because He loved communicating with the Father
2. Jesus prayed this way because He needed guidance and comfort which He received from communion with God.
3. Jesus prayed this way because His task was great and He needed spiritual help which He gained from fellowship with God.
4. Jesus prayed this way to set an example for us to follow and the example is that prayer is as common to the life of God's people as singing is to a mockingbird.

Prayer was as common to Jesus as our morning coffee is to us. It's the way he started the day and the way he finished the day. Deadlines didn't get in the way of prayer; they drove home the need for more prayer.

The pace of our lives is set to constantly try and make us hurry up, but God wants us to slow down. He wants us to remember that He is God and we are not. He wants us to rest in the fact that though we do have weighty responsibilities we should also remember that we can't do it alone.

John Piper writes:

"The very spirit and essence of prayer is dependence. So, even when we are not speaking consciously to God, there is a deep, abiding dependence on him that is woven into the very essence of our faith. In that sense, we are praying. We are experiencing a spirit of dependence continuously, and that kind of disposition is, I think, right at the heart of what God creates when he creates a Christian. There should be a spirit of dependence that permeates all we do."

So here's the first application for us in how to live for Christ today; rather than allowing your schedule, your iPhone and your inbox to drive you toward irritability, selfishness and stress; allow those things to drive you to prayer. Build prayer into the rhythm of your

morning as consistently as coffee. Voice your dependence upon God. Ask for His help in keeping a watch on your heart and life.

**But there is something specific that we should also be praying for...Gospel Advance.**

## **II. Pray for the Gospel's Advance (v. 3-4)**

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Don't miss the fact of what Paul is asking for here and the context of his request. He is in prison for preaching the gospel and here we see him asking the church to pray for God to enable him to...***preach the gospel***. This man lived with a sense of gospel urgency that was incredible and all of us could stand to catch some of what he had.

**Paul here is asking for one of two things:** either he is asking for God to open the door of his prison cell so that he can take the gospel out into the world. Or, he is praying for God to open the hearts of his hearers so that they will see their need of Christ and will repent and believe. Either way, he is calling on the church to pray for the gospel to advance and bear fruit, and he wants to be a part of that even if that means he remain behind bars.

Do you ever find yourself at a loss for what to pray for? **Pray for boldness and a burning desire to share the gospel. Pray that the gospel would be declared and that more people would be born again.** The heartbeat of the Christian life is the gospel, that we are saved from our sin and the wrath of God because Christ took our place on the cross. We deserved death and judgment, but in His mercy God applied the blood of Christ to our account. We are saved by faith in Him and when we truly come to an understanding of this gospel reality we want others to know it as well.

**The result is two-fold: we pray and we proclaim.** First of all, we bear witness to the testimony of Christ; we preach the gospel. We teach it to our children, we share it with our friends, we comfort our family with the truth in the hopes that all will see their need of Christ and believe. Secondly, we pray for God to make the gospel clear and undeniable. Pray for your lost loved ones and ask God to open their eyes and hearts to the gospel truth.

Yes, there are things going on in your life that you should pray about. There are big decisions in front of you and you should be praying for God for wisdom, guidance, patience, and confidence. There are things going on in the lives of others that you should be praying about: sickness, uncertainty, marital problems, struggles with sin, etc. That's why we email out a weekly prayer list. But there is one major thing going on in the world

that we should be praying about all the time and it's the need for folks to hear the gospel and be saved.

*1. Devote Yourself to Prayer, 2. Pray for the Gospel's Advance...*

### III. Live Wisely (v. 5)

<sup>5</sup> ***Walk in wisdom*** toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

**Be wise in the way you act, especially toward outsiders/unbelievers.** You see in this verse that Paul assumes that Christians are going to be in regular contact with those who are outside the faith. And because we are going to be engaging with unbelievers on a regular basis he wants us to make the most of our time with them. How are we supposed to do that? By conducting ourselves with wisdom.

Now this is going to be a challenge for us because at a foundational level we are more prone to feeling than we are thinking. And wisdom requires that we think our way through life more than we feel our way through life. Most of us, not all, but most of us have more of a tendency to elevate the importance of how something makes us feel over the importance of whether or not it is right and wise. **There is room in our lives for both, but notice that Paul doesn't say that we should walk in emotion toward outsiders. He calls for wisdom.**

**Christian Wisdom is the mental capacity to understand and function according to Biblical truth.** As Christians we should govern our conduct with unbelievers on the basis of Biblical wisdom. What constitutes Biblical wisdom?

**First**, it begins with a proper fear of God which means we stand in awe of God and we give appropriate respect to His Word. Our lives are oriented around our Creator God as the center and source of all things.

**Second**, we let the word of God/Christ dwell in us richly, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another. We read the Bible. We study the Bible. We listen to sound teaching and we let all that we learn shape our view of the world, of family, of others, of life.

**Third**, process through the decisions in your life with the fear of God and the Word of God as the guiding principles. Some decisions are simple because the Word of God is clear.

Let me give you a few questions to help us make decisions when it's not so clear what to do.

- 1. Is this spiritually beneficial to me personally and to the gospel generally?**
- 2. Will this decision make God look glorious or will it slander His name?**
- 3. Will this cause me to lose self-control?**
- 4. Will my actions be affecting others in a sinful way or a godly way?**
- 5. Does this violate God Word? Is it illegal?**
- 6. Can I do this in a way that glorifies God?**
- 7. Am I following the example of Jesus to help reconcile sinners to God?**

Christ calls us to walk in wisdom with outsiders and not waste our time with them. In other words, we should make use of every opportunity to magnify Christ in our relationship with others. There should be a greater sense of urgency in us about the gospel and the need for other to see and hear the truth.

And when we do speak up we should speak of grace and with grace...

***1. Devote Yourself to Prayer, 2. Pray for the Gospel's Advance, 3. Live Wisely...***

#### **IV. Speak Graciously/Powerfully (v. 6)**

***<sup>6</sup>Let your speech always be gracious***, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Conduct and speech go hand in hand. The way we feel or think in the moment is typically going to come out of our mouths because the primary way that we communicate is through speech. And so a component of the command for us to walk in wisdom is to exercise self-control in the area of our speech. **Once again this is going to be hard for many of us because we have a tendency to say what we feel and Paul is saying that we need to let our speech be filtered through grace and seasoned with salt.**

Let your speech be ***gracious*** and ***salty***. One of these refers to the attitude of our communication while the other refers to the impact of our words. To speak **graciously** means that we speak with care and concern for others. There is a connection between the attitude of our hearts and the way we communicate with others. For instance, if you are an angry person it is going to come out of your mouth. If you are a bitter person, the people around you know it because of the way you talk. If you are a person who has come to understand and enjoy the grace of God then that grace should flow out of your mouth to others.

For our speech to be **salty** means that we should speak in a way that makes an impact. This is not a reference to speaking like a sailor, but a reference to speech that is witty, winsome and powerful. This doesn't mean that we master the art of the one-liner but that our words have an impact on a person's heart. I think the best way that we can do this is to be so thoroughly familiar with the rudimentary truths of the Christian faith that we can give clear and powerful answers.

***1. Devote Yourself to Prayer, 2. Pray for the Gospel's Advance, 3. Live Wisely and 4. Speak Graciously.***

### ***Conclusion...***

These are foundational disciplines for living the Christian life and if we aren't careful we may learn to treat them like an old set of golf clubs. Some of us have an old set of clubs and back in the day we used them all the time, but over the years those clubs got pushed to the back of the garage and every now and then we pull them out to go play a round. Then we come home, shove them back in the corner and forget about them for months. This is the definition of a hobby, and Christianity is not a hobby, but we often treat it like it is.

Prayer shouldn't be that thing we do once every couple of months. Advancing the gospel shouldn't be that thing we only did back in college. Living with godly wisdom is the calling every day. Speaking with grace and impacting the lives of others with the truth should be our daily goal...

At the end of the day, as Christians we want to let the gospel shape our lives. We want to value what God values and we want to love what He loves. We don't want to live as though the only things that matter are the items on our to do list, but rather we want to live by pressing into the spiritual reality that God is there and He loves us and He saved us and He wants us to cry out to Him in prayer.

He wants us to look at the people in our lives not just as those who serve to meet our needs in some way but as souls who will live for eternity. He wants us to live like eternity really matters and that means we care about where our loved ones will spend eternity. So we pray to God for gospel courage and we pray to God for gospel fruit. We get up every morning desiring to live wisely and to speak graciously/powerfully.