

Colossians

chapter 4

(ii) How to treat workers (4:1)

Colossians 4:1

¹You slave owners must be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven.

As discussed in the commentary on chapter 3, the reference to slavery here is one that should not be used to justify such a practice. These few verses dealing with the conduct of Christians and slavery are to be seen as regulating an existing cultural practice, which could be very oppressive. While the Scriptures regulate the practice of the slavery, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, it does not endorse it. In fact, the Old Testament makes provision for the release of slaves, and the provision of their freedom (refer to Leviticus 25:38-41; Deuteronomy 15:12-17).

Today, we should treat these verses as principles for employer-employee relationships. They serve as warnings to both employers and employees. To employers (masters) the Bible warns against ruthless lording over their employees (slaves) with a reminder that they themselves are actually servants of a heavenly

Master. Perhaps this analogy could be drawn as far the relationships between pastors and their congregations as well. Pastors need to be ever mindful that they are only under-shepherds, not the actual Shepherd of the local church.

Employers and Church leaders need to be vigilant in guarding against arrogance and self-importance. Peter Daniels, a millionaire Christian businessman, tells the story of how he taught his son a lesson in customer service by highlighting how poor most churches were with their "customer service". He told his son that he would give \$50,000 to the first pastor who returned his phone call. He then proceeded to call 50 pastors. With each call he either reached an answering machine or a secretary (personal assistants these days). When he asked these secretaries if he could talk to their pastor, he was told in every case, that the pastor was too busy to take his call. He left his phone number and asked to be called back. Not one of these pastors rang him back! Unwittingly, they had missed an opportunity to be the recipients of \$50,000. But Peter Daniels' point was that pastors are often missing opportunities to grow their churches because they are so wrapped up in their own self-importance, and have made themselves almost unreachable. In some cases this is occurring between a pastor and his own congregation! We could render this verse to read: *Pastors! Remember that you too have a Pastor in heaven. Treat your people as you expect your Pastor in Heaven to treat you!*

D. PRAYER INSTRUCTIONS (4:2 – 6)

(i) How to pray (4:2 – 4)

Colossians 4:2

²*Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.*

Consider some of these quotes from some great men of prayer-

What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organizations, or more novel methods; but men whom the Holy Spirit can use--men of prayer, men mighty in prayer.

E. M. Bounds

I have benefited by my praying for others; for by making an errand to God for them, I have gotten something for myself.

Samuel Rutherford

The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel.

Thomas Watson

When you pray, rather let your heart be without words, than your words be without heart.

John Bunyan

Prayer will make a man cease from sin; or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.

John Bunyan

I find the above quotes quite stirring. Of all the things we are told to pray most often in Scripture, it is prayers of thanks. We can pray to change our circumstances, but we should pray prayers of thanks. We don't thank God *for* our circumstances, but *in* our circumstances.

I like this verse because it doesn't discount intelligent praying. It says we are to pray with an *alert* mind. We can be informed from quite natural sources about how we should pray. This can come from reading, visiting, researching, or teaching. Christian praying is not a matter of being unintelligent! This proper use of the mind is not an excuse to become so sophisticated that we actually avoid praying, but using our minds in a God-honouring way should lead us to be more devoted to God through prayer.

Colossians 4:3

³Don't forget to pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to preach about his secret plan—that Christ is also for you Gentiles. That is why I am here in chains.

Again the focus of our praying for the lost is not primarily directed toward the lost, but the ones called to reach the lost. When Jesus looked at the masses of people needing salvation, whom He referred to as the "harvest", His prayer was then immediately for preachers, not the lost.

³⁶He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷He said to his disciples, "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. ³⁸So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields."

Matthew 9:36-38

We could devote ourselves entirely to praying for the lost, and still never see anyone saved unless someone shares the Gospel with them.

¹³For "Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? ¹⁵And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Romans 10:13-15

Paul reinforces his plea for prayer based on the price he was paying for preaching it. This epistle was being written from a prison cell, where Paul was in chains. This was a statement of Paul's passion and determination to preach the Gospel despite the obstacles or cost. It stands in stark contrast to many who call themselves preachers today who almost treat preaching as a career that must provide them with a certain level of remuneration. Recently I heard of one evangelist who arrived to preach at an outreach and asked to take up his own love offering. The organiser of the outreach said that this wasn't really appropriate since there was so many unsaved present. The evangelist insisted, but the organising pastor stood his ground. The result was that just minutes before the outreach speaker was due to preach, he angrily left feeling that he was being deprived financially. This motive for preaching is completely foreign to the one prescribed in the New Testament and exemplified in the life of the earliest preachers.

Colossians 4:4

⁴Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.

Paul's first prayer request is for opportunities to preach to Gentiles (verse 3). This second request is that he be able to seize those opportunities and share the Gospel as clearly as possible. It's my guess that since Paul requests that he be able to preach the Gospel clearly, it must be possible, and perhaps all too common, that the Gospel be preached in a way that is not clear. Therefore, this prayer request is worth repeating for the preachers that you know (especially this one writing this).

(ii) Live your prayer (4:5 –6)**Colossians 4:5**

⁵*Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity.*

Paul has just requested prayer for increased opportunities to share the Gospel. Now he urges every believer to take advantage of the opportunities that they are presented with. His preface to live wisely among the unsaved almost implies that wise living will create opportunities among the unsaved.

Colossians 4:6

⁶*Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone.*

Christians should stand out from the crowd by the way they talk. The NLT renders this verse by saying that our conversations should be gracious and effective. Many other translations render this verse by saying that our conversations should be “seasoned with salt” which has Old Testament sacrificial overtones (refer also to Exodus 30:35).

¹³*Season all your grain offerings with salt, to remind you of God's covenant. Never forget to add salt to your grain offerings.*

Leviticus 2:13

The purpose of salt in the Old Testament offerings was to season them which was typical of how God wants us to be seasoned with His Holy Spirit. By allowing the Holy Spirit to season our conversations, they become as the NLT renders this passage, *gracious and effective*. But it also reminds us that our speech should be a reflection of the holiness of God. Paul also said this in Ephesians, where he specifically forbade dirty jokes, swearing, and obscene stories (Ephesians 5:4). In a world where this kind of talk is common, the Christian will stand out from the crowd by the way their tongues are so controlled and sanctified. Little wonder the initial evidence of being baptised in the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues, as this is often the area of greatest susceptibility and yet potential in the life of the believer.

FAREWELLS (4:7 – 18)

Colossians 4:7

⁷*Tychicus, a much loved brother, will tell you how I am getting along. He is a faithful helper who serves the Lord with me.*

Tychicus was a very faithful assistant to Paul. He is referred to five times in the New Testament (Acts 20:4; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7; 2Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12). Paul appears to have leaned heavily on Tychicus throughout his ministry. No doubt, Paul was able to achieve all that he did because men like Tychicus were prepared to lay down their lives and serve the way they did. Great leaders are only ever as great as the level of commitment and competence around them in the form of others who serve them. We notice Paul's reference to Tychicus here. Paul doesn't refer to Tychicus as *his* servant, but as a fellow servant of the Lord. This is one of the keys of a truly great leader- they themselves maintain a servant heart.

Colossians 4:8

⁸*I have sent him on this special trip to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you.*

Paul had enough trust in Tychicus to charge him with the duty of delivering this epistle, the ones to Ephesus and Laodicea, along with news, and messages of encouragement. There is a kind of trust that only belongs to the Lord.

⁸*It is better to trust the LORD than to put confidence in people.*

⁹*It is better to trust the LORD than to put confidence in princes.*

Psalm 118:8-9

But there is another kind of trust that is a measure of a healthy relationship. In the Church we need these kind of relationships of trust. While we all get let down by people, this is no reason to entirely stop trusting others. We should trust those brothers and sisters in the Lord who have proven themselves *trustworthy*. Likewise, we ourselves should earn the trust of others. Tychicus stands out as a great example of a trustworthy servant of the Lord.

Colossians 4:9

⁹I am also sending Onesimus, a faithful and much loved brother, one of your own people. He and Tychicus will give you all the latest news.

Tychicus did not travel alone; he was accompanied by Onesimus. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ sent disciples out two-by-two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). We know that in the very beginning God created mankind to live as man and wife, two people together. This reinforces that we need each other. In this instance, Tychicus was being supported by Onesimus who was a former runaway slave, who fled his master in Ephesus. Paul's epistle to Philemon, Onesimus' master, reveals the journey that Onesimus had experienced.

¹⁰My plea is that you show kindness to Onesimus. I think of him as my own son because he became a believer as a result of my ministry here in prison. ¹¹Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. ¹²I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.



It would have taken great character on Onesimus' part to return to Ephesus via Colossae. It would have meant that he would be facing the consequences of his running away from his master, which in that era would ordinarily have carried severe repercussions.

Colossians 4:10

¹⁰ Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. And as you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way.

Aristarchus was another of Paul's most trusted companions. He endured beatings in Ephesus for the sake of the Gospel (Acts 19:29); was shipwrecked with Paul on one of his journeys (Acts 27); and here we find him chained alongside Paul in a prison. That's faithfulness!

Aristarchus probably first met Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 27:2), and he may well have been the "Macedonian man" that appeared to Paul in a dream from the Lord.

⁹That night Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia in northern Greece, pleading with him, "Come over here and help us." ¹⁰So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, for we could only conclude that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

Acts 16:9-10

Since Paul had travelled to Thessalonica quite early in his ministry, it is reasonable to assume that Aristarchus had been with him for quite a long time. To have gone through what he had in his support of Paul's missionary activity shows that he was also a man of incredible depth of character.

Paul's reference to Mark shows remarkable grace and restoration considering their initial falling out. (John) Mark abandoned his cousin, Barnabas, and Paul on their first missionary venture. The occasion of their second missions trip saw Barnabas and Paul have a heated dispute over whether John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, should be permitted to join them again.

³⁷Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. ³⁸But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not shared in their work. ³⁹Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus.

Acts 15:37-39

Between this event and Paul writing to the Colossians, something truly remarkable had happened.

¹¹Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me.

2Timothy 4:11

From Mark's first disappointing missions trip, he went on to become the trusted friend and companion of the original apostles (refer to 1Peter 5:13), a travelling companion, and an author of one of the most sacred books in all of human history. Paul's instruction to the church to warmly welcome Mark when he comes to the church was an extremely high commendation.

Colossians 4:11

¹¹Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish Christians among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been!

We are not told anything about this particular Justus. But this reference to him which includes him as being among the aforementioned Jewish Christians, tells us that the names of the people sending greetings following this point are Gentiles. Paul took great delight in having Jewish believers working with him. In Romans 9 he shares how he would give up his own salvation if it meant that other Jews could come to know Christ. Christ did not come to establish a new religion, but a new covenant. Christianity is not so much a competing religion to Judaism, but the divine continuation of it. Perhaps we see a glimpse here of Paul's great disappointment that not more Jews in his day turned to Christ and followed his example of sharing the Gospel with the whole world.

Colossians 4:12

¹²Epaphras, from your city, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident of the whole will of God.

Paul began this epistle by honouring Epaphras, and now he concludes it by doing the same. Epaphras obviously displayed a true pastor/overseer's heart. Note his ministry qualities: (i) he was a servant of Christ; (ii) he interceded for his people, and, (iii) he was a faithful preacher of the Gospel. We also see the heart of a pastor/overseer in the content of his prayer for the Colossian church.

In the absence of their pastor he prays that they will be strong, complete (perfect) and fully confident of the whole will of God. Today there are many believers who are not strong, but ruffled by even the slightest offence. Neither are they pursuing completion, but are upset by those appointed by God to stretch them to completion by bringing correction to their lives. And perhaps most disturbingly, they are unsure of God's will for their lives. Considering the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians together we see that clearly God's will for the believer starts in the local church. By placing ourselves into the local church, sitting under the teaching of the Word of God, and using any talents, gifts, or abilities that God has given us, we are walking in the whole will of God for our lives. This contrasts to the heresy being promulgated by the Judaizers and Gnostics who sought to diminish each of these areas.

Colossians 4:13

¹³I can assure you that he has agonized for you and also for the Christians in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Ministry is not done without an array of emotions being felt by the minister. Many pastors in the modern era have been driven to heart attacks, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and a swag of other pressure and stress induced ailments, because they too agonised over the spiritual condition of their flock. As a pastor for over the last ten years of my life, I know what its like to have your health, sleep, family and finances affected, simply by my concern for the condition of those in my pastoral care. If it wasn't for the Lord Jesus, I personally wouldn't do very well as a pastor.

Colossians 4:14

¹⁴Dear Doctor Luke sends his greetings, and so does Demas.

Doctor Luke was the author of the Gospel of Luke. His mention here shows us that he was a Gentile.

Colossians 4:15

¹⁵Please give my greetings to our Christian brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and those who meet in her house.

This reference to Nympha, and the church that met in her house shows us that the church of the first century was reasonably embryonic in its organisation. When we read an epistle like Colossians which was to be read to the entire church there, we most naturally filter that through our modern Western perspective of Church and imagine that they all came together in one sitting and listened together. But this reference gives us a hint that quite possibly the "church" at Colossae was made up of many house churches.

This has led some modern church leaders to conclude that this is how the Church should be conducting itself today. But this fails to recognise the growth and development of the Church, and the changing circumstances in which the Church has found itself throughout the ages. It is not unbiblical for a church to own a building and property. It is not unbiblical for the church to meet together in one place at one time to conduct a worship service. While there is great merit in a church having house groups (cells, home fellowship groups) these do not precede the importance of the general coming together of the whole church.

Colossians 4:16

¹⁶After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them.

This statement shows us that this epistle was written by Paul as a circular epistle. Many scholars believe, based on the surviving fragmentary remains of discovered manuscripts, that these epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians were written with various recipients being addressed. Thus the epistle that Paul refers to as being addressed to the Laodiceans was probably the letter that we know as *Ephesians*. It also shows us that while Paul was addressing actual issues in the Colossian church, these issues were clearly thought to be applicable to the broader Church as well. Indeed the issues dealt with in this epistle are indeed even timely and appropriate for today.



Colossians 4:17

¹⁷And say to Archippus, "Be sure to carry out the work the Lord gave you."

Archippus is referred to in Philemon 2 as having a church that met in his house. What an amazing thing that the Holy Spirit speaks not just to church congregations, but directly to individuals as well. Perhaps this man had lost heart and was discouraged. What a tremendous boost this would have been to receive this piece of encouraging admonition. It now stands as a word from God for all others serving the Lord but discouraged in their service. No matter what the Lord has called us to do, whether discerned directly or intuitively, we too should be sure to carry out this work.

Colossians 4:18

*¹⁸Here is my greeting in my own handwriting -
PAUL.
Remember my chains.
May the grace of God be with you.*

While Paul used a secretary to actually write down his epistles, he seems to have made a practice of concluding them with his own handwritten signature. The thought of an old preacher now in chains would have stirred the hearts of the recipients to be even more dedicated to the cause of the Gospel no matter what the obstacles may have been. My prayer is that we too will begin to understand the price that has been paid: to firstly bring the salvation that we enjoy, and secondly, the Good News (Gospel) of that salvation that can save the lost and set the oppressed free.

Amen.