



Colossians has been a treasure-trove of not only Bible Doctrine but directives for a godly lifestyle. Throughout the Book of Colossians, Paul gives instructions on how to live out the Christian life. On Wednesday night, we examined the relationship between Christian husbands, wives, and their children. We also looked at a Christian employee's responsibilities to their employer.

Wives and husbands have Jesus as the standard in their relationship with their spouses. Wives are to line up under the authority of their husbands (in English, we use the word 'submit') for that. It was a military term in Greek. Although equal, a woman lays aside certain privileges of equality in the same way that Jesus emptied Himself for a time period, laying aside all of the rights that were His as God. A woman's submission is a voluntary deference to the husband, who is the leader. The husband is commanded to unselfishly love his wife. Love is something you do, and to follow the Lord's command, a husband must do this. The wife submits to an imperfect husband, and the husband selflessly loves an imperfect wife. The Holy Spirit makes this possible for both of them. It cannot be done in the flesh. We also looked at attitudes that should be in the heart of the Christian employee.

They should do their work "as unto the Lord." God gives us our jobs, and we are to work in a way that pleases Him. This means we work in a way that brings glory to God, never slacking off just because the boss isn't around. An example of this would be my work as a pastor of this congregation. God keeps an account of whether or not I am doing all that I'm supposed to do as a pastor. He watches when I punch in and when I punch out. My biblical duties mainly involve the "teaching of the Word," but pastoring (being a true shepherd) often consists of taking that call to encourage or drop in on someone in a hospital room. I must do this job as God calls me to do it. The same holds true in a position for or outside of the Church. The critical verse Paul gives is from Chapter three that we finished on Wednesday night ¹²² *Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.* ²³ *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men"* (Colossians 3:22,23, NKJV).

Let's turn now to Colossians chapter four and read it together.

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

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.

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. 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. (Colossians 4:1-12, NKJV).

Prayer.

Paul instructs: *"Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair."* A modern application of this would be the employer-employee relationship. We applied the idea of a "bondservant" to an employee, and a "master" is analogous to an employer. In the same way that employees should view their work "as unto the Lord," employers must understand that they are accountable to God for how they treat their employees. When a person or group employs a person, the employee must do the work "as unto the Lord," but likewise, the employer must compensate them "as unto the Lord."

The employer that the Holy Spirit governs will understand that *"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,"* and *"The laborer is worthy of his wages."* (1 Timothy 5:18, NKJV). This means that Christian employers should never hold back what is due to those who work for them. When we hire someone to do work for us, we should never begrudge them their compensation. This holds true for those who repair our cars, clean our houses, build our fences, or tend to our cattle. It is in an employers self interest to see that their employees are properly compensated.

This is doubly true for those who are paid for Christian service. The Bible gives clear instruction of the importance and appropriateness of providing for our pastors and workers who are diligent in serving their congregations. Diligence is required of the Christian worker (there is much hard work involved in answering God's call), but fairness and generosity are required of the Church that employs that person. It is a two-way street. Churches are bound to look after the physical/financial needs of those who minister to them. Paul tells us to not overwork or underpay our staff. A Church should

never try to get by on paying a servant as little as they can, and a person who serves the Church should never try to get by in doing as little as they can.

The Church should be as generous as it is able to be. Paul tells Timothy, *"¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18, NKJV).*

Paul served without compensation, but that seems to be an exception. He earned his own living through tent-making (Acts 18:3; 1 Corinthians 9:3-18; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Paul explains in detail why he worked that way and he explained that although compensation was due him, he forewent it for a specific teaching purpose or financial purpose. Many small Churches are without the means to pay a pastor, but God will and does provide a way for that congregation to be fed spiritually. He does however require that a Church provide support for a worker as soon as they are able to do so. In ancient Israel, God set aside an entire tribe to minister to Israel and they were wholly supported by the nation. Both individuals and Churches have a Master in heaven who witnesses how we take care of those that serve us, and this same Master in heaven keeps an accounting of all of these matters, and will hold those accountable who work for the Church as well as those who are in charge of employing others.

In verses two and three Paul speaks of the overriding importance of prayer. It is easy in our lives or in our Church to mistakenly believe that "success" depends on us. I used to tell my children to "work as though it all depends on you, but pray knowing that it all depends on God." EVERYTHING WE DO SHOULD BE BATHED IN PRAYER. This includes prayer before we do anything, prayer while we do anything, and pray after we have done anything. If prayer isn't in it, it is done in the flesh.

I am careful each Sunday to spend a few minutes in prayer before a service. This happens in my room, by myself, after the powerpoint is refined and sent to the Church. My soul is settled, my thoughts become consecrated. It is sweet. Nothing is as powerless as a sermon preached in the flesh. It may be a good sales job, but it's just a "sales job." It is not a word from the Lord. Paul exhorts us to "continue earnestly in prayer." That's not a half-hearted or half-baked approach to prayer, but it is focusing in on prayer. On our journey in Christ, prayer is as important as putting gas in the tank before you go on a trip. That's because prayer is putting gas in the car before you go on a journey.

Many Christians forget that prayer is a discipline. It can be laborious, but it can be sweet and precious as well. It can be laborious because anything and everything will try to sneak in and steal your time with the Lord. We have to set time aside to pray. Paul tells us that it is something we have to approach earnestly. It must be approached intently.

Along with this prayer is the overriding and all-encompassing mandate to every believer: **"Be vigilant in prayer with thanksgiving."** That means WAKE UP AND FOCUS IN ON COMMUNICATING WITH THE MASTER AND THANK HIM FOR EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE. We're told, *"¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NKJV). Thanksgiving is the expression of joy in the heart of the believer. Prayer is how we deal with our circumstances. I love the one I heard from Pastor Michael Havens about the two Christians talking to one another, and one asked the other: "How are you today?" The other one replied: "Well, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES I guess I'm okay." The first said, "UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES??!! GET OUT FROM UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES! YOU DON'T BELONG THERE."

That is a funny story, but it truly characterizes the prevailing attitude in the Christian life and in the Christian walk. We are told in scripture, *⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:6-7, NKJV). And EVERYTHING MEANS EVERYTHING. Paul writes the little Church in Philippi, telling them once again that the antidote for anxiety in the Christian life is prayer coupled with thanksgiving.



Sisters and brothers, THIS IS THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN LIVING. THIS IS WALKING IN CHRIST. THIS IS WALKING IN THE SPIRIT. We are not just told to do these things, WE ARE ORDERED. You can only do this through the operative power of the Holy Spirit in your life. When I first met Pastor Michael, he also related a story to me about a preacher named Smith Wigglesworth. He was a prayer warrior. People said that he lived in such a state of prayer that you could smell prayer on him. Paul teaches us over and over to be intentional in our prayer. I pray that the "smell of prayer" would be on each of us.

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. (Colossians 4:5, NKJV).

We are to be wise in how we interact with unbelievers. They are watching to see if we walk the talk that we have. It is easy for us to turn unbelievers away from the Lord by our actions and uncaring attitudes. We are not to be people that waste time. We are to be very wise in how we treat those who come into our path. I'm not blaming anyone in here, but during our first year we had a couple that came and spent about two months with us. They put up chairs, cleaned up things, and then one day they stopped coming. This week she wrote me and asked for help on something. I asked her point blank why they had stopped coming and how much I wished that they had stayed around. She told

me: "No way did you offend us, the congregation at that time, was not welcoming at all (except the 'well man's family')." We need to walk in wisdom toward those who are outside (and I would add "inside").

Step out of YOUR comfort zone, and minister to the person sitting next to you. God put them there. Don't think that the person in here sitting by you has been here any longer than you have. Welcome one another and love one another. Don't let the person next to you make the initiative to say "hello." We are all newcomers here, and you'll never know the story of the person next to you until you make an effort to know the story of the person next to you. Be careful as well around unbelievers. You may be the only "Jesus" with whom they ever have an encounter. Be careful in your business dealings with others. Don't talk down to people. Be positive and lift others up.

⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. (Colossians 4:6, NKJV).

And we are to let our speech ALWAYS BE FULL OF GRACE. Are you careful around unbelievers? Is your speech filled with anger and bitterness, or is it full of grace? We should let our gentle spirit be evident in the words that come out of our mouth. If you have a hard time understanding how you should model your speech, think about the most joyful person in this congregation. Let your speech be like his. I am not trying to bring glory to anyone because I will not, but Paul sometimes exhibited the right attitude to be followed by pointing to an area in his own life where he had been victorious.

⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:9, NKJV).

Paul then ends the letter giving greetings from the various fellow believers that were involved in the effort. It is interesting that he points out who is Jewish and who is Gentile. He explains that they're all working together to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and raised. This is the second reference Paul has made to the unity of the believer. Being a believer in Jesus Christ erases all ethnic and racial boundaries. The believer understands better than the world that we are all created equal in the sight of God and the ground is level at the foot of the cross. As we leave this little Church in Colossae, I pray that as you have received Christ Jesus, you will set forth on a new intensity to pray without ceasing, and as you have received Jesus, so walk in Him.

Let us pray.

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