

## Are We Ready? Col 4:1-6

Tease: Can you remember in school the teacher would say that “the next piece of information was important”, or maybe they would say “you will see this again” to hint that it would be on a future test. The teacher was telling you to get ready for the test. That is exactly what the Apostle Paul was doing with the Colossians in Colossians Chapter 4. Join us this Sunday as Pastor Rich explores the question “Are we Ready?” from Colossians 4:1-6. In Sunday School, we will begin our study of the Old Testament book of Joshua at 9am and our worship service begins at 10am.

## Are We Ready? Col 4:1-6

As we begin our study this morning we need to see that the chapter and verse divisions are not part of the original writing and sometimes they fall in unfortunate places. We see one of those unfortunate divisions here in our text this morning. Clearly verse 1 is attached to the paragraph we studied last week. I should have picked that up when I put the preaching schedule together. So, our message will be in two sections this week. But I think we can tie it all together. So, let’s jump into the text this morning.

In order to put our first verse in proper context we must go back to a couple verses from last week.

*Colossians 3:22–25 (ESV)*

*22Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.*

*23Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,*

*24knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

*25For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

We saw in these verses last week that the slave was be completely obedient to his master in everything. Like children the slave did not have the right to pick and choose what to obey. They were required to be obedient in everything. We extrapolated from that the principle that applies to us, since none of us are slaves, other than to Christ. The principle is that as employees were to work hard to serve our bosses, giving them the very best that we can do. Once I understood this principle I worked as hard as I could at the Sheriff's Office. Giving more than was necessary to get buy. As followers of Jesus that should not even be in our vocabulary, to just do enough to get by. We should work as hard as possible to complete the jobs given and provide our employers with the best possible outcome. That same ethic I continue here in my job here at Friendship Grace

Brethren Church. I work hard to provide the materials and lead you all in following the Lord. It is a rare day that I do nothing for the church. Between the administrative stuff, the visits, the study and writing there is little time left. I sometimes have to force myself to do other things. That is one reason I go back in ham radio. It was something for me to focus on that was not church related. It also gets me involved with other people outside of church.

We need to be focused on working as hard as we can. But hard work is not the only criteria. We need to complete the job and do the best we can for our bosses. It is into this context that we have chapter 4 verse 1.

*Colossians 4:1 (ESV)*

*1 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

Slaves obey your master in everything. Masters treat your slaves justly and fairly.

As I studied this I was curious what justly and fairly really mean. How were those words used in the original text by the apostle Paul? The word “justly” in the original Hellenistic world spoke of conforming to custom. But by the time the apostle Paul was writing He used the word to speak of one who was focused on being a good disciple who would be vindicated by being obedient. I love that. The slave master should treat their slaves

as a disciple who is working to be vindicated by God for being obedient.

“Fairly” is the idea of equitable or being equal. The same word is used to speak of Jesus being equal with God the Father. From this I take that Paul was instructing slave owners to treat their slaves like they stand equal before God. Remember what we saw at the end of verse 25 in chapter 3. “there is no partiality”. Of course, there is a difference in society and in position but before God we all stand the same, equal, viewed by God as saved by the blood of Jesus.

The slave owner needs to remember that before God he and his slave are equal and treat them accordingly. Add to this the reality that we are all slaves, even the masters are slaves of Jesus Christ. That should be motivation enough for us to treat others properly.

From these verses in the first section today we are reminded that we all stand before God in the same position with the same value. So, we ought to not think of ourselves better than anyone else.

Now let’s move on to the bulk of our text this morning.

*Colossians 4:2 (ESV)*

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

As we enter into this paragraph we see that Paul is beginning to close his instructions to the Colossians.

The Apostle Paul says we are to continue steadfastly in Prayer. Notice we are to continue in prayer. That means there is already a culture of prayer and they are to continue in it. The word steadfastly simply means to be “devoted to”. Paul was telling the Colossians and I believe all the church that we are to have a culture of prayer which means we are to be devoted to prayer. We are to be devoted to a life of prayer.

We expect to hear from God but we often fail to speak to God. I know in my own life prayer is easy for me to neglect. I have been reading and studying prayer in an effort to become a better prayer. Sure, it is easy to blurt out in our mind a request to God to deal with a situation. But I am not sure that is what Paul was talking about here. Elsewhere Paul says to pray without ceasing. Well that changes the calculus of what prayer is and how we do it. If prayer is hands folded and head bowed then it is not possible to do that all the time or without ceasing. I think prayer is much more than that, it is an attitude of knowing and remembering that God is there all the time. It also involves unspoken communication bi-directionally between you and God. Much like a long time married couple who can communicate without voicing a word.

So, when Paul tells the Colossians that they are to continue with devotion to prayer I believe he is telling them to be like an old

married couple who can communicate bi-directionally without voicing a word. When you are in a relationship with God like that you are in a proper relationship with God.

Paul also says that we are to be watchful in it with thanksgiving. I think Paul is reminding us that it is easy to get complacent in our prayer life. Just asking for what we want or praying when trouble pops up. He also includes thanksgiving. This is where I think most of us fail in our prayer. We forget that we also need to be thanking God for all that He does for us and gives us.

When I lead in corporate prayer I usually try to remind people to be thankful and to praise God and worship Him in their prayer. I think this is more important than our requests.

*Colossians 4:3 (ESV)*

*3At 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—*

At the same time, we are praying we need to include in our communication with God for the work of the gospel. I want you to think about the historical context here for a moment. Paul is in prison, maybe even chained to Roman guards, but his request is for the Colossians to remember to pray for him as he seeks to evangelize those around him. His prayer is that the door would be open to the gospel so he could declare the mystery of Christ. Of course, the mystery of Christ is the redemptive work of the

messiah. It is a mystery to those who have not yet been indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Paul could have asked for a lot of things, including his release from prison, better personal situation, for his health etc. But that is not what he was focused on. He was focused on spreading the gospel and making a difference in the world with the gospel message. I want to be so dedicated that I am more concerned with the gospel than I am by own personal situation, even if I were in prison. That is a goal we all should be working toward.

Paul also says that his focus on the gospel message is why he was in prison. Paul recognized that he was sitting in a Roman prison cell because he was effective with the gospel message and Satan wanted him out of the way. We have said this many times as we have worked our way through the prison epistles. Satan is not concerned with you if you are doing nothing for God. But when you get busy serving God then Satan takes notice and begins to fight with you. Paul was in prison in an attempt by Satan to thwart his ministry. Paul was making the best of it and working while in prison.

*Colossians 4:4 (ESV)*

*4that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

Paul was also asking that the Colossians pray that he is able to make the gospel clear, which is how he ought to speak. His is requesting that the Colossians pray that Paul is able to make the

mystery of Jesus clear to those God places in his path. Whether that is the Roman guards he may be chained to, the other prisoners or even the house of Caesar as he goes to trial and is made a spectacle of. Paul wants to make sure that he is clear in his approach to the gospel. Do you recognize how selfless this is? In prison but his concern is that he is clear in the presentation of the gospel.

Verse 2-4 are all about our prayer life and what is important to pray for. Notice that it was not personal “I wants” but was all focused on worship, Service and ministry. We have been working on deriving principles from the text in our Wednesday Evening Bible Studies and you all have been doing great at that. So, as we look at these verses you should begin seeing some principles here. Such as Prayer is more than an emergency utterance. It is something we should be doing all the time. As followers of Jesus our prayers should be more than just about us but should be focused on our service of God with a sense of spiritual alertness. We also see that Paul understood evangelism begins with prayer. If we want to see this congregation grow we need to be praying that way. Pray for opportunities to witness, pray for boldness to witness. Pray that we are faithful, even in struggles to evangelize.

*Colossians 4:5 (ESV)*

*5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*

We see here that Paul shifts from his own evangelistic efforts to that of the people of Colossae and I believe we can apply these instruction to us as well. Paul tells the Colossians they are to walk in wisdom to outsiders. What does Paul mean when he talks about wisdom in this context. Based upon the immediate context I think that Paul means that we should be smart about our evangelistic efforts. Be bold to present the gospel to unbelievers but also to have tact. That means you have boldness but you do not go in and hit the people with baseball bats condemning them for not believing. It sometimes takes years of testimony and witness. For example, last year at the Sheriff's Office Old Timers reunion we spent some time with one of my former bosses and mentors at the sheriff's office. He was my sergeant when I first became a detective. He taught me how to interview and interrogate people, how to investigate crimes and how to write a good report. We had spent years working together and becoming friends. I had attempted to share the gospel with him several times but he was never very interested. We would sometimes have long conversations about the Lord but for him it seemed more of a scientific exploration rather than a spiritual seeking. Last year at the reunion he told me that he had come to know the Lord the previous year and a large part of why he did was my witness and testimony to him. I was not there when he came to know the Lord, I did not even know about it but years of prayer and testimony was used by God in his life. Other times people are prepared and come to the Lord like Chris did in our men's Bible Study. Sometimes you have to

move slow and steady and other times you have to jump on the occasion. That is what Paul is talking about here. Being able to read people and know where you are with them.

Paul goes on to say we need to make the best use of our time. Sometimes people are argumentative and have no interest in hearing the gospel. Don't stand there toe to toe with them punching it out. Make better use of your time.

*Colossians 4:6 (ESV)*

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

Paul amplifies verse 5 here in verse 6. We need to be gracious in our presentation of the gospel. Not watering it down because Paul tells us elsewhere that we need to preach the truth, but we need to know how we should communicate with each person. One of the things that I tried to teach new supervisors under my command at the Sheriff's office was how to evaluate people and speak to them accordingly. Some people you have to be blunt and direct. Others you need to be quieter and calm with.

Paul also tells us that we need to be gracious with people. Of course, Paul is not talking about divine grace here, but the result of divine grace which give us the ability to interface with people in a friendly and joyful manner. I think what Paul is saying here is that we do not need to beat people up but to speak of the joy of the Lord and speak out relationship and speak with grace in

our voice. I have heard some who witness by condemning people and making them feel really bad about themselves so that they are forced to turn to Jesus for redemption. I am not sure that truly works.

He says we are to be seasoned with salt. This can be used in two ways. Salt is used as a preserving to maintain the meat which would mean we are to present the gospel by sticking to the actual gospel. Not telling people that God has a wonderful plan for their life and if they just turn to Jesus everything will be butterflies, rainbows and unicorns. God does have a wonderful plan for their life but how He defines wonderful and how we define may be different. We need to be telling people that we are sinners and as sinners we have violated God which results in eternal damnation apart from the blood of Jesus. Jesus paid the price for our sins and we need to accept the free offer of grace made by God to us and ask Him to forgive our sins and now see us in light of Jesus blood.

Paul concludes this paragraph with the reason we need to be gracious and know the gospel. Why we need to be in prayer about our evangelism. It is so that we may know how to answer each person.

*1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)*

*15but in your hearts honor 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*

We need to know what we believe and how to tell others of what we believe. As good followers of Jesus we need to be prepared to talk to the people God places in our path about what we believe. That is not really hard to do, but does require you to know what you believe. Each of us should be able to do this.

## Conclusion

Paul begins by reminding us to pray for those out and engaged in ministry. For us that would be our missionaries in one aspect. But it also means that our prayer should be for all of us as we seek to evangelize those around us. Evangelism is not just done by the “professionals” but is to be done by everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus. We need to pray that doors will be open to us and that we step into those doors. We need to be prepared to share the gospel with those around us and to recognize how to approach each person. We need to make the best use of our time not wasting time with people. I recently talked to someone who told me he had not presented the gospel to someone yet because they were not ready for it. That is the job of the Holy Spirit and not us. We need to be prepared to present the gospel at any time.

The apostle Paul makes all of this very clear in our text this morning. In the context of the entire book Paul is providing for the Colossians and for us how real followers of Jesus are to live

and act. It is to be a consistent lifestyle, 24/7 not just a couple hours on Sunday morning if even then. It is a lifestyle not a moment style.

Let's Pray!