

Colossians 4

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder what your passions are in life. What fires you up. I have friends who! are fired up by particular football clubs, by particular movies, by particular activities.

! Some of us are so passionate about mountain bike riding, but almost any weekend they'll be down the M4 to get to Wales or wherever it is they want to go, and off on their bikes. Others are so passionate about their gardens, I know some of you are. All these things are good things to enjoy, aren't they? But I wonder what is the most important thing to be truly passionate about. I wonder if you could hear, just what I read there, what the Apostle Paul was passionate about, what had gripped him. You see, he was really passionate about making Christ known. He talks in that section we've read about asking the Colossians to pray for him. He talks about those who are fellow workers in the Kingdom of God. Earlier on in the lesson, back in chapter 1, verse 28, he'd given us his personal mission statement. We proclaim Christ warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. It's a passion that led Paul to be locked up in prison, as he alludes to here. And it was a passion that wasn't just based on his personal preferences, or what was rather cool and trendy to be doing amongst his peers. It was a passion that was based on what God had done in Christ in history.

Both in Paul's personal history, turning him around from religion, and setting him free from pride and self-righteousness to live for his Creator. It was also based on what God had done in general history.

Sending Christ to die on the cross. Raising believers to new life in Christ, so they're new people. And what he's doing present in the lives of believers, transforming them, renewing them in knowledge, in the image of their Creator, as Paul said back in chapter 3, verse 10. So Paul is passionate about Christ and making him known, because Christ is the reality. It's in Christ that God is working his purposes out. And also, time is short. Paul knows there's a day coming at the end. If you look across the column there, it's chapter 3, verse 4. Paul says this, So Paul has this passion to share Christ, to pursue God's purpose, because of what Christ has done in him, what Christ is doing, and what Christ will do when he comes back.

And that's not just a personal preference for Paul. It's something that he expects all Christians to be caught up with. Because God has caught Christians up in his purposes.

[2 : 42] And so Paul is writing this letter to say, because God has done that, we should pursue God's purposes together. We should pursue God's purposes together. We should have purposeful lives.

Some people wonder what they should do in life. Some people wonder what their purpose should be. Well, Paul says you have a purpose. If you've been raised to new life with Christ, you have a purpose. And so what does that look like as we live it out? As we listen to what Paul says here, we see it means purposeful prayer, purposeful conduct, and purposeful partnership. Prayer, conduct, and partnership, all with a purpose. So it's like a purposeful prayer, first of all, verses 2 to 4 of chapter 4. See what Paul commands there, verse 2. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Other translations capture the idea here very well.

Well, they say devote yourselves to prayer. That's a helpful way to think about it. The dictionary definition of the word in the original language is to continue to do something with intense effort, with a possible implication of doing it despite difficulty. Devote yourself to it, with effort, even when it's hard. It's like the athlete who, in the long winter months, still gets up early in the morning to train, even though it's wet and cold outside. Why does he do it? Because he's passionate about his sport. It's like the elderly man I knew, who was devoted to his wife, passionate about her.

So even though she was blind, bedridden, and suffering extreme dementia, Dick devoted those last 10 years of his life to caring for her, spooning the food into her mouth.

Why was he devoted to her like that despite the difficulties? Because he loved her. She was a passion of his wife. So that's how Paul commands the Colossians to be. God is taking you up into his purposes. Let's be passionate. Let's be devoted. Let's be purposeful in prayer. Why? Because it's valuable. Because God's work is valuable. You see what we're to pray for.

[4 : 55] So I don't know about you, but I can easily think of prayer as being a duty. Yes, I'm a Christian. I should pray. I should get a list out and pray for the people on my list. That's not a bad thing to do. But for Paul, it's not merely a duty. Rather, it's an inevitable consequence of his passion for others to come to know the life and forgiveness and freedom that there is in Jesus.

So that's what he's wanting the Colossians to pray for. Look at verse 3. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word. That means a door into people's hearts and minds that they can understand and believe and grasp the truth about Jesus.

It doesn't come naturally to any of us. We need God's supernatural power. But there's another side to the same coin. If people are to come to know Jesus, not only does God need to open their hearts, but look at the end of verse 3.

The preacher needs to make it clear. So pray for us to declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison. Pray that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

So that's what we should pray for. Pray for the doors to be opened to the gospel, the preachers to declare the gospel clearly. But how are we to pray? Five times a day like Islam?

[6 : 11] For ten minutes every morning, like I was always taught growing up in my evangelical church? Now look how Paul says we're to pray. We're to be watchful and thankful, he says in verse 2.

Watchful. What's the opposite of being watchful? If a night's security guard is not being watchful, what will he do? He'll fall asleep, won't he? He'll zone out like people in front of the television, just watching nonsense.

Our prayer is for the opposite of that. To be watchful, alert to spiritual realities. Jesus taught his disciples to watch and pray, that they wouldn't fall into temptation and into knowledge that he was coming back.

So let's be aware of spiritual realities. We should be thankful as well. It's one of the themes that comes again and again throughout this letter. Rejoicing, being thankful for what God has already done in Christ.

It's so easy to turn up with our shopping lists, isn't it? Things we want from God. Yet supremely we can be thankful that he's made us new people in Christ. So that's what we're to pray for, the progress of the gospel, how we're to pray, being watchful and thankful.

[7 : 16] And Paul gives us an example of this. If you look over the page to verse 12, Paul gives us a little case study. He talks about this man, Epaphras, who started the church in Colossae. He says this, Epaphras, who is one of you, he comes from Colossae, he is a servant of Christ Jesus.

He greets you. He's always struggling on your behalf in his prayers. That word struggling. He's agonizing. It's the word we get the word agonizing from in English.

He's agonizing in prayers on your behalf, that you may stand mature and fully assured. I bear witness that he has worked hard for you. And for those in the Odyssey and Hyrapalus.

He's working in prayer. That's how passionate he is about God's purposes. They will stand mature. So prayer is work. It's purposeful work.

So Paul says, let's have purposeful prayers. Thankful. Watchful. Praying for people to come to Christ. So we're going to be purposeful in our prayers. We're also to be purposeful in our conduct.

[8 : 18] Look at verse 5. Here's the second command Paul gives. Walk in wisdom towards outsiders. Making the best use of every opportunity. That word walk is a command.

It's not just a description. It just doesn't mean about how you move from one place to another. It's about how you go through life. Paul is saying, be purposeful in your conduct. And do you notice that includes two things.

First of all, an awareness of the audience. Be wise. Walk in wisdom towards outsiders. Paul is saying, as you live your life, where people outside the Christian faith, looking in, in your workplace, as they see you in your family, they're looking on.

So be wise in the way you live before them. Most people will never get around to opening a Bible on their own. All they'll know about the Christian life, other than the rubbish they hear and use, is what they see in the lives of Christian believers around them.

So Paul says, have purposeful conduct. Be purposeful in the way you live. That means being aware of the audience, who's looking on. Your colleagues, your friends, your family.

[9 : 28] But also being aware of the time. Look how he puts it there. At the end of verse 5. Making the best use of the time. In the original language, the actual word is from the marketplace.

It means buying up the time. We often see limited sales, don't we? On Amazon this morning, things that are only on sale today. You've got limited time to buy them up. To get the most out of your money there.

That's the kind of idea Paul has here. There's a limited time. It's a limited time before your job changes. Before people move off. Before Jesus comes back.

So be aware of the audience as you live. Be aware of the lack of time. Buy it back. Use it wisely.

That means walk purposely. Be purposeful in your conduct, says Paul.

Be different. Live life in line with God's purposes. And here's how we're to do that. Verse 6. Let your speech always be gracious.

[10 : 28] Seasoned with salt. So that you may know how you ought to answer each person. See, here's the second aspect of our purposeful conduct.

It's partly about our walking, how we live. It's also about our talking, what we say. How should we talk? Paul says, let your speech be gracious. Not bitter. Not moaning about the job cuts or the management or the politicians.

Or moaning about the weather being too hot or too wet or too whatever. Great British tradition, isn't it? It's not even that hot, anyway. Not putting others down.

Not speaking to others with grace. Speaking to others in the kind manner in which Jesus has reached out to us. And also, speech should be seasoned with salt.

What does salt get used for? Why do people ever add salt to their food? There are two reasons, aren't there? One is to make it taste better. Got some bland food, put some salt on it.

[11 : 26] It tastes nicer. In the same way, our conversation shouldn't just be bland. Let's just talk about the weather. Let's just talk about the football results. Neither should it be...

The other reason people put salt on food, of course, is to preserve it, isn't it? In the same way, conversation can so easily degenerate into that which is rotten and filthy and stinks.

Paul says, not so, Christian believers. Your conversation should be different. Because you serve a Lord in whom you have new life. So, our talking should be different.

It should be gracious. And it should be salty. And as Christians, those of us who are Christians, we can talk about anything in an interesting way. Remember what Paul said back in chapter 1.

In Christ, God is redeeming all things, visible and invisible, whether in heaven or on earth. He is putting all things back together as they should be. So there is not a topic of conversation that is not in some way included with all things.

[12 : 30] Whenever we're in a serious conversation with anybody, the good news about what Jesus has done is actually only a hair-breadth away. Because it affects everything, doesn't it? Now, does that mean that Christians should just crowbar the gospel into the conversation with everyone?

Does that mean we're always looking for opportunities to kind of press play and download our Christian message at people? No, not at all. Look at verse 6. Paul says we'd have salty, gracious conversation.

Why? End of verse 6. So you may know how you ought to answer each person. So not to hit everyone with a pre-packaged formula of Christian belief.

But to respond individually and respectfully to each individual. Now, let me be clear. There are a couple of things here. What every Christian's responsibility is and what every Christian's responsibility isn't.

So first of all, what is it? Well, what does Paul say there? You ought to be able to... You know how you ought to answer each person. If Jesus really is the one saviour, if Jesus is the one who has given his life to put us back to God, then surely we should want to keep on learning about him.

[13 : 47] We want to be able to articulate what we believe and why so that we can respond when those questions come up. Of course, it doesn't matter if you don't know the answer when someone asks you something. You can say, that's okay, I don't know.

I'll go find out and come back to you. It's an honest way of dealing with it. But we ought to answer each one. But you may be thinking, hang on, I'm a new Christian, or I'm still trying to understand this, or speaking to others about Jesus isn't my gift.

Well, let's be clear on what is everyone's responsibility and what isn't. And we can see that if we look closely at the contrast between verse 4 and verse 6. It's actually easier to see in the original language, but we can catch it in the English as well.

And the key word is the word ought, which is in verse 4 and in verse 6. So what's the preacher to do? What should Paul do? What ought Paul to do? Verse 4, Pray that I may make it, the gospel, clear, which is how I ought to speak.

So that's what the preacher's job is, to make the message of Jesus clear. But what ought every Christian to do? Look back at verse 6 again. You know how you ought to answer each person.

[14:59] See the difference? Not everyone ought to preach the gospel publicly. But everyone ought to be able to answer questions privately.

Not everyone should spend their lives proclaiming Christ, as Paul did. But everyone should live their lives provoking questions about Christ, as Paul's telling the Colossians.

So this is why he's telling us, we should have purposeful conduct. Time is short. So in the way you walk, and the way you talk, live on purpose, so that others may come to know Jesus.

I have a couple of friends, a married couple who are friends of mine. The husband is a very gifted preacher. He's off at Bible college now, and will one day be leading a church somewhere. In fact, he's preaching the next couple of weeks at the church he's in.

He's very gifted in that way. His wife is quite a quiet, shy type in many ways. But there are two women in her school, she's a teacher, there are two women in her school who have, through Becca's life and witness, come along to courses about Christianity, are reading the Bible with her, because they've seen something different in Becca, in the way she lives, in the way she talks, in the way she teaches.

[16:12] And so they're asking questions. Not everyone is to proclaim for us, but we are all to provoke questions about Christ through our purposeful conduct. So, because God has caught Christians up in his great purposes, we should be purposeful in prayer, purposeful in our conduct, and finally we see Paul being purposeful in partnerships.

We don't have time to look at this in depth, although it would be very interesting to do over the page if you turn it over. Verses 7 to the end. We see Paul being purposeful in building up partnerships for God's purposes.

In the company I used to work for many years ago, every year we had to write 250 words when it came to pay review time. And in those 250 words were our contribution sheet.

We had to write down what we'd done to contribute to the business. And there were two ways you could do that. There was building organisation, or building organisational capacity, or building the business commercially.

Building organisational capacity, or building a business commercially. In other words, what have I done to help grow the organisation? What have I done to help sell more toothpaste? Which is my job.

[17:24] Well, Paul does kind of the same things here. He's building partnership to pursue this business that God is in. The business of bringing people back to himself through Christ. And so there's two categories for his partnership.

He's working to build the church to maturity, and to build the church numerically. You see the maturity part if you look at verse 7. This guy, Titicus, Titicus, who is being, he's a postman.

He's taking this letter from wherever Paul was to the Colossians. Look at what Paul says. Titicus will tell you all about my activities. He's a beloved brother, and faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord.

I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. Paul wants the Colossians to know how he's getting on. So they can pray for him, as he just asked them to do.

And he's sending his very best and valued co-worker, Titicus, to do it. This isn't just like becoming someone's friend on Facebook, kind of easy thing. He's really investing in his partnership.

[18:26] And it's a mutual thing. He wants to encourage their hearts. He wants the Colossians to grow to maturity. So this is his partnership, building the church to maturity. And there's another way Paul is doing that, and that's through not only his costly partnership, but also through his clear communication.

Look down to verse 16 for a moment. I could spend hours on this, but I won't, because time is short. So verse 16, Paul says, When this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you also read the letter from the Laodicean.

You get the picture here. Paul's writing letters to all these various churches, and he says, This is God's word to you all, so make sure you swap, make sure you read them. Now what we're seeing here is a little insight into how we come to have the New Testament we have.

As Paul the Apostle wrote these letters, copies were made and circulated amongst the churches, and ultimately gathered up. Gathered up at the time, actually. So churches could learn from them together.

I don't know if you remember the Da Vinci Code. If you've forgotten it, that's good. But in that, Dan Brown made this, the author kind of argued that actually the Bible had only been invented really about 400 years later.

[19 : 41] Absolute nonsense. We see here a little glimpse into how these things come to be in our hands. And also, did you notice some of the names as I was reading it? Back in verse 10, Paul talks about Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

Mark, who wrote Mark's Gospel. Then, verse 14. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas. Luke, who wrote the Gospel and wrote the Acts of the Apostles.

Get this little insight into how God inspired his New Testament to be written. That was all part of building the church in maturity. But also, Paul is concerned with building partnership to build the church numerically.

Look at verse 11. He talks about Aristarchus and Mark and Jesus, who is called Justice. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God.

And they'd be a comfort to me. Notice Paul's partnering with these three men who, like him, are Jews. But he also mentions three other names, Tychicus and Nessimus and Luke and Demas, four other names, who are Gentiles.

[20 : 48] They're all partnering together. Why? In the work of the kingdom of God. In the work of making the world know that Jesus is king. See, that is Paul's passion in life.

The Christian life, the Christian mission, is to make Jesus known. It's not a solo sport. It's not like playing tennis on your own. It's a team game. So Paul enters into personal partnerships, purposeful partnerships, to make Christ known.

I'm really encouraged to see that next door in the council offices there, there are two Christian groups working together to make Christ known. In fact, yes, they were very kindly invited to a prayer meeting where we could thank God for the work he'd done through the groups there and through the evening lunchtime talks.

Purposeful partnership to make Christ known, to build up the church in maturity and build up the church numerically. We are not on our own.

Now, for all of us who've met the Lord Jesus Christ, we've been transferred from the prison of our own selfish ways into the glorious freedom of Jesus' kingdom. We've been rescued from alienation from God and reconciled to him.

[21 : 58] We've been rescued from being dead in our old way of life and being raised to a new life. There is nothing more important happening in the world than what God is doing through Christ.

So God has called us up in his purposes. So let's pursue God's purposes together with our purposeful prayer, purposeful conduct, and purposeful partnership to make Christ known.

Let me pray for us. Let's pray for us.