

# Colossians 4:2-6

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want to speak from just three verses to my Colossians, chapter 4 verses 2 to 4.

! I was going to do 2 to 6, and it was just going to be too long. So Colossians 2, Colossians chapter 4 verses 2 to 4. There are a number of subjects that a preacher or a Bible teacher can touch on and almost be certain to stir the conscience of Christian Gears.

All but the most insensitive find certain subjects awkward and threatening and guilt arousing. I think there are four subjects like that that I find.

They're almost always like this. Whenever I speak about forgiveness, I know that there will be some who are troubled by a secret bitter grudge that they bear.

Whenever I speak about sexual purity, I know that there will be those who are troubled by their secret thoughts and their behavior. Whenever I speak about prayer, I know that if my heroes are Christians, then their consciences will be easily provoked.

[ 1 : 21 ] And whenever I speak about sharing the gospel with unbelievers, I know that many of my heroes are inwardly wishing that I would talk about something else. And I know all of that, not only because of how people speak to me about these subjects, but because I do that when I'm a hearer.

And today, we come to the end of Paul's, well, pretty much the end of Paul's letters, I believe it's in Colossae. And we find that Paul speaks about prayer, and then next week he's going to be just as bad, because he's going to talk about speaking from believers, but we'll wait until next week for that. The evidence, in the New Testament, is that the Apostle Paul was a remarkable prayer. At the beginning of this letter, he spoke so naturally about when we pray for you, chapter 1, verse 3.

And it's clear from the Apostle Paul, that this wasn't just an occasional thing. It says, from the day we heard of your faith, verse 4.

From the day we heard about your faith, and love, and hope in Christ, we've not ceased, we've not stopped praying for you. Or chapter 1, verse 9. And so from the day we heard, we've not ceased to pray for you.

[ 2 : 37 ] And Paul says something similar, in his letter to Romans, in Ephesians, in Philippians, in Thessalonians, as well as in the lightest, to Timothy and Philemon.

And we can see, that Paul took prayer, very seriously indeed, and in most particular, considerable amount of his time. And as this, great man spoke about his own praying, at the beginning of the letter, he's now going to say something to you and I, about our praying, as the letter comes to a close.

And I already suspect, that this is one of those sermons, where some of you, who maybe have more sensitive consciences, are finding difficult. Because our minds turn immediately, don't we, to our secret failures in praying.

How inadequate, we feel as prayers. How little time and effort, we give to prayer. How easy it is, for that to be the first thing, that's dropped from our daily lives.

And so we can go on. Shame, and guilt. I am so very pleased, that there is no one here, who knows how feeble, my praying really is.

[ 3 : 49 ] Do I want an amen? Anyone share that sentiment? However, I'm going to rouse your conscience, like that. And it's so easy, to do that.

And I don't want to be flippant, about it. But I want to suggest, that God's word, actually does not work, like that. It certainly doesn't work, like that in Colossus chapter 4. And preachers, and teachers, need to be very careful, because you can, quite easily, play on sensitive consciences, and temper emotions.

There are various techniques, and actually, if you've done a little bit, of public speaking, you will know, how to manipulate, the feelings of your hearers. And that is a very, significant temptation, for

the preacher.

The word of God, deals with many, sensitive subjects, and it's easy, for the preacher, to stir up memories, in the hearers. Because the preacher, has those memories too.

And it touches, raw nerves, that you know, so well, because you have them too. But is that the work, of the Holy Spirit? Is that, what the word of God, does with those sensitive issues?

[ 4 : 58 ] Don't miss hearing, I'm not saying, that the bylaw, doesn't surge, our consciences, of course it does. Nor the shame, and guilt. We should ignore it, or we should deny it, or we should run away from it.

The spirit of God, does stir up, our emotions, doesn't he? He stirs, our consciences. By his word. But I am simply saying, that actually, the Bible teacher's task, is to ensure, what's the Bible teacher's task?

It is to ensure, that God's word, does God's work. Rather than, manipulating preaching, doing the preacher's work. That's what the Bible teacher, is to do. He is to allow God's word, to do God's work.

And faithful, exposition of the Bible, should allow the Bible, to set the agenda, in church life. And that takes great care. Now I'm particularly struck, in these three verses, how Paul speaks to you, and I, about prayer.

So firstly, we see, the first thing we should notice, about Colossians chapter 4, verse 2, is that it's a call to prayer. It's a serious call to pray. Indeed, it's a call, isn't it, for us to follow, the apostle Paul himself, as we heard, at the beginning of the letter.

[ 6 : 06 ] And the power of the call to pray, comes, in the context, of the whole of the letter, is not just in these verses. So like, we read, at the start of the reading, in chapter 3, from the start of chapter 3, chapter 3 is an exposition, of the life of faith, in Christ Jesus.

What does it look like, to live out a Christian life? And Paul's theme, at this point, on through his letter, is as you've received Christ, so walk in him.

Rooted and built up in him, established in faith. Just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. And that will mean praying. Why?

And the answer to that question, is the same as the reason, why Paul had not stopped praying, to the believers, in Colossae. From the day he heard about it. It's because something, absolutely wonderful, and something extraordinary, is going on.

That our Lord Jesus Christ, is the one through whom, and for whom, all things have been made. And by his death on the cross, God has reconciled, all things to him, through Christ. God is bringing, all things back together again.

[ 7 : 18 ] He's bringing, do you remember, order out of chaos, peace out of hostility, reconciliation out of alienation. And it's Christ among the nations, the hope of glory.

And that is why Paul prayed, if you look at chapter 1, verse 9 and 10. He asks, that you may be filled, with the knowledge of his will, and all spiritual wisdom, I'm understanding. So, as to walk in a manner, worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, bearing fruit, in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge, of God.

And Paul prayed that, not simply just as a discipline, and certainly not to move, an inactive God, to activity. Paul prayed that, because of the extraordinary work, that God has done, and God was doing, and God will do.

But it's even more than that. The call to pray, Colossians chapter 4, verse 2, comes to us, because through faith, in Christ, God is turning, chaos to order, hostility to peace, alienation to reconciliation, in our lives.

And praying, is a characteristic, of a reordered life. And that really, has been the subject, of the letter, from chapter 3, verse 1. So in contrast, to the chaos, prayer and peace, with God, go together.

[ 8 : 42 ] No, God's enemies, don't pray. The reconciled, pray. The alienated, don't. In other words, if we've been listening, to the teaching, of this letter, we will not hear, the call to pray, in chapter 4, verse 2, as an obligation, that condemns you, and threatens you, and rouses you, out of a sense of guilt.

But rather, it is a gospel call. It is a gospel invitation. Now listen to the way, the call is worded, in this call to prayer. First of all, continue steadfastly, in prayer, the apostle says.

Other translators say, devote yourself to prayer. Devote yourself to prayer. The same words are found, in a number of places, in the New Testament. So, it's what the apostles, were called to do, in Acts chapter 6, verse 4.

Do you remember, there was the problem, with the widows, and the leaders, the elders, the apostles, they devoted themselves, to prayer, and the ministry of the word. It's what the 3,000, who received the word, on the day of Pentecost, did.

They devoted themselves, to the apostles teaching, and the fellowship, and the bringing of bread, and the prayers. It's true. It's what the disciples did, immediately after, Christ went up into heaven, the ascension.

[10:01] As they waited in Jerusalem, they devoted themselves, to prayer. And there is a commitment, to praying, expressed here. But there is also, sense, and it's hard, to find the right word.

We'll try privilege, and see if that works. That when you, when you know, and you understand, the grace of God, in Jesus, praying is what you do. Praying is what you do, when you're conscious, of what God has done, and what God is doing, and what God will do.

It's precisely, what we heard Paul do, at the start of the letter. Look at Colossians chapter 1, verse 3. We always thank God, the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard, of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love, that you have for all the saints.

Because of the hope, that's laid up for you in heaven, of this you've heard, before, in the word, of the truth, the gospel. Which has come to you, and as indeed, the whole world, it is bearing fruit, and increasing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it, and understood, the grace of God, and truth.

Just as you learned it, from Epaphras, our beloved fellow, Saron, he is a faithful minister, of Christ, on your behalf, and has made known to us, your love, in the spirit. Continue, steadfastly in prayer, devote yourself to prayer.

[11:21] So what will help us, to heed this call to pray? And the second thing, under a call to pray, is to be watchful. Do you see that? Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful.

What does watchful mean? To be awake. So praying, is not, in other words, is not the sleepy activity, we might sometimes think, or sometimes practice.

It requires, an alertness. But I read, one awful commentary, that said that, verse two, went off on one, saying, well it's so difficult, this is when you pray, at the end of the day, and you're so tired, and you drift off into sleep.

And we can often, feel sleepy, when we pray, that's sometimes why, it's good to get out, and prayer walk. If you want a prayer walk, fair enough, it's nothing to do at all. You see, what is it talking about, when it says, being watchful?

It's simply, not, just drift off, like the disciples, in the garden of Gethsemane, on that occasion. But praying, to pray, means that you need to be awake, to what is really happening.

[12:33] So what is really happening? What is Paul talking about, is really happening? Colossians, think about it. Paul is saying, be alert, don't lose sight of the fact, that you have, chapter 3, verse 1, been raised with Christ.

You've died with Christ. And your life, is hidden with Christ in God. Be watchful of that. Keep awake, to what is soon, to happen, when Christ, who is your life, appears.

And you will appear, with him in glory. That is the watchfulness, it's talking about. That is the alertness, that being conscious, of what is really going on, in the world, and in life.

And it's a characteristic, of the Christian life, that's worth emphasizing, isn't it? So Jesus told it to me. He said, therefore, stay awake. What does he mean, when Jesus said that?

Didn't he mean, don't go to sleep? What does he mean? He says, therefore, stay awake, for you do not know, when the master's house, will come in the evening, or at midnight, or when the roof of the crows, or in the morning, lest he suddenly come, and find you asleep.

[13:38] And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake, stay watchful. Or again, Jesus said, stay awake, for you do not know, on what day, your Lord is coming. Or again, watch, it's the same word, watch and pray, that you may not enter, into temptation.

And we're talking about, alertness to reality, keeping your eyes, of faith, open, it is having, the work of God, and his Christ, in your consciousness.

And when we see, life, and the world, in this brilliant light, when we understand, what is actually going on, then we will hear, this call to pray, properly. The third thing, in this call to prayer, is thanksgiving, isn't it?

Continue steadfastly, in prayer, being watchful, being with thanksgiving. And that helps us, doesn't it? Why does that help us? Well, it helps us, because it settles the fact, that this call to pray, in chapter 4 verse 2, is not intended, to be guilt driven.

On the contrary, we have to pray, with thanksgiving, being watchful. It's not a matter, of being frightened, or worried, or anxious. on the contrary.

[14:59] Like the whole, Christian life, praying, is energised, by thankfulness. Now this particular note, actually, is really striking, Colossians.

I think, I missed it incredibly, but, Colossians has been described, as the most thankful document, in the New Testament. It began with, Paul's own, doesn't it?

We always, verses 3, chapter 1, we always thank God, since we give your faith, in Christ Jesus.

And then his prayer, for the Colossian believers, with the request, that they would be, giving thanks, to the Father, who is qualified, to share, in the inheritance, of the saints, in light.

And indeed, the point of this letter, chapter 2, verse 7, where the theme, of the letter, is spelt out, includes the readers, will abound, can you see it? Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, just as he was told, abounding in thanksgiving.

When he comes to sum up, the Christian life, in chapter 3, verse 17, he says, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus. And we very often, these young prology, next to it, do we? Giving thanks to God, the Father, through him.

[16:12] At one point, in the letter, he simply, and starkly says, be thankful. And so, as we hear the words, of Colossians chapter 4, and verse 2 tonight, I'm hoping, and indeed, I'll be praying this week, that we will be moved, each one of us, to be serious about praying.

More serious than we've been. But that we will be moved to pray, not by feeling guilty, and shame, of how inadequate, we are as prayers, but by being walking up, by being made alert, and by thankfulness.

That's the cause of prayer. The second point is this, pray for us. Praying that is watchful, and thankful, will certainly be about a range of things, won't it? And when we hear about Paul's praying, in chapter 1, and verse 9, we noted then, that praying in the New Testament, is really asking.

And if you are unsure, what wakeful, thankful, believers ask God for, well a very good place, is to look at the prayers of Paul, in the New Testament, particularly, the prayers in Colossians.

In Colossians chapter 4, verse 3, he gives us some specific, guidance for the Colossian believers. Can you see what he says? He says, pray for us, at the same time.

[17:29] Us, who are they asking? It's Timothy and Paul, they are the senders of the letter.

Perhaps he's including, other gospel servants, like Epaphras. However, he's specifically requesting, prayers for himself.

As the following words made clear. Watchful, thankful, praying, will particularly pray, about what God is doing. That's what Paul constantly did.

And that will mean, praying, for preachers of the gospel. Now, I find that quite hard. I find all the things, I find it quite difficult, to give you lots of prayer requests, about different things.

I find it quite hard, to actually pray for me, as the preacher of the gospel. You can psychoanalyze that, until your heart's going to take a shot. And I don't want to say, that praying for other things, is unworthy.

But it is striking, isn't it? Think about the context. Where is Paul, when he wrote the letter? Where is Paul, when he wrote the letter? He's in prison. So the suffering, in prison, Paul, whose life is in danger, does not pray, the kind of prayer, that I suspect, I would call for, if I was in chains.

[18:40] I am certain, that the believers in Colossae, would have prayed, for Paul's release. I'm sure, that they would have prayed, for Paul's safety. They would have prayed, for Paul's physical needs.

They may rather be, praying for those things, before this letter arrived. But that isn't what, Paul asked for prayer, for the position. What is Atamos, in Paul's mind?

Because he is awake, he's alert, he's watchful, and because he's thankful, he asks them to pray, for what? Well again, it's interesting, to play on words, that God may open to us, a door.

A door for what? The prison door? No, it's a door for the word. It's not that God, would open the jail doors, that was relatively, unimportant, whether or not, he remained in bondage, but pray that God, will open a door, for the word.

Again, we've got to think, about the letter. Recall how, earlier on in the letter, Paul had spoken, for the powerful work, of the gospel. The powerful work, of the gospel, was accomplishing, throughout the world.

[ 19 : 51 ] He called it, do you remember it? The word of truth, chapter 1 verse 5. The word of truth, that was bearing fruit, in Colossae, and the whole world. We're coming to faith, in Christ Jesus, and all that flows, from that.

And Paul is urged, that that word, this word of Christ, chapter 3 verse 16, would dwell, in you richly, as you teach, and admonish, on another.

chapter 3 verse 16. By this word, God is doing, his worldwide work. Indeed, his creation work.

That work of, reconciliation, and bringing together. This word, was advancing, through, servants of the gospel. And he explained that, to us, back in chapter 1, verse 24.

Paul. And now he says, pray that God, would open to us, a door for the word, the work of his word. The word of his word, is not something, that we human beings, can accomplish.

[ 21 : 01 ] We cannot accomplish, the work of the word, ourselves. Even the apostle, Paul, knew that God, must open the doors, for this word.

If it's going to, achieve its purpose. doors of opportunity. The doors of human hearts. And that is a reminder, friends, of how hard, this work is.

In our enthusiasm, and in our triumphalism, we sometimes, give the impression, that if, if as a church, we just got, our strategy right. That if only, we learned, to be more relevant.

that if only, we harnessed, the powers, of technology, properly. And if only, we properly learned, the art, of contextualization.

If only, we had leaders, that were more, entrepreneurial. If only, our music, was just, better, and more, up to date, or just, more professional.

[ 22 : 08 ] Then, at that point, we would have the impact. And such enthusiasm, it had into disillusionment.

Our denomination, this week, launched its new website. I don't really, sorry, it's very, very good. It's very, very good. Apart from, it looks like, it's been copied, from another website. That's another story.

But, it's been incredible, some of the responses, that I've had, not from people, within this congregation. This, this really, changes, how people view IPC. It didn't say, this kind of, elevates you, to the big tech, but that was the kind of idea.

Now, it's good to have good websites, isn't it? But, do you have any idea, how tightly shut, and bolted, the doors are, to this word? Do you have any idea? Do you have any idea, how thick the darkness is?

The alienation is extreme. Hostility is intense. You can have that, we can have the greatest website, in the world. There's more people in the doors, but it won't do the doors work.

[ 23 : 24 ] This word, will only do its work, if, can you see it, God may open the door. So, pray to be well. And, when he does, the responsibility of servants like Paul, it's very clear, isn't it?

It's to declare, the mystery of Christ. And he keeps reminding us, at this point in the letter, of that earlier discussion, to remember, it's quite complex, in some ways, in chapter, in chapter one, at the end of chapter one.

Remember, there's the secret plan, of God, for the whole world, that is going to reconcile, all things, through Christ. That is the mystery, that's the secret. He talked about it, in chapter one, in verse 26. The mystery hidden, for ages and generations, but now revealed, in the saints.

Well, it was hidden, for generations, and for ages, but now it's been revealed, verse 22 and 27. To then, God chose to make known, how great among the Gentiles, are the riches of the glory, of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone, and teaching everyone, with all wisdom, that we represent, ever a material in Christ. And so Paul says, do pray that God, will open a door, for this labour, for this work, to be effective.

[ 24 : 37 ] And that is what we will do, if we're watchful, if we're alert, to what God is doing, and we're thankful. It's very serious, isn't it? The third thing, he talks about, is bondage, in these verses.

On account of which, I am in prison. The great work, that Paul is asking, his readers to do, to pray about, is there, isn't it?

On account of which, I am in prison. And again, he's reminding us, about the earlier teaching, of the service of the gospel. I found Colossians, it's so intricate. He's spoken, isn't he?

Chapter 1 verse 21, Now I rejoice, in my sufferings, for your sake. The opposition, and the resistance, and the firmness, of the closed doors, against the gospel, are such, that the gospel, the sermon of the gospel, will suffer.

We will not simply triumph. We will not simply triumph. We will not be able to boast, just how great our achievements.

[ 25 : 44 ] Therefore, Paul's imprisonment, it's the first thing, he's mentioned in this letter, but the way he mentions it, looks like they would know, about it already. Paul's imprisonment, is a spur to pray.

It's a spur to pray, that God will open, a door for this word. For if he does not, the word will accomplish nothing, but the suffering, of the messengers. Do pray. Not that those, who proclaim Christ, will not suffer.

He's not asking you, to pray that. He's not asking you, to pray that preachers, will not suffer. But that as they suffer, God will open the door, to the word. And finally, we're reminded in verse 4, to pray for clarity, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Paul's description, in his labours, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. The apostles, God-given task, was to reveal, the mystery, to the world. To make known, God's secret, hidden plan, for the world, which is history, by proclaiming Christ.

Him, we proclaim. Warning everyone, and teaching everyone, with all wisdom, that we represent, ever and mature Christ. That's what I toil at, he says. That's what I struggle with.

[ 26 : 57 ] All the energy, that I have, that he powerfully, works within me. Pray for an open door, for that work. So think back, what have we heard, this evening?

Do you think, the apostle, has been trying, to make you feel bad, about how far, you fall short, in your prayer life? Do you think, he's been trying, to stir up guilt, tight, to motivate you, to pray more? I don't think, that's his purpose. Do you think, that Paul would expect, that his words, would have any effect? Well, yes I do. But do you see, how it works? Praying, like Paul's praying, comes not from, from the guilt.

Guilt, does it? Not even, from a sense of duty. Please don't, misunderstand me, I'm not saying, there's anything wrong, with a sense of duty. I'm not saying, there's anything wrong, with responding properly, to a proper sense of guilt.

I'm just saying, that's not how it works here, is it? It comes from, watchfulness, to thankfulness.

Watchfulness, and thankfulness, not from being told, to be watchful, and to be thankful, and feeling guilty, about not being watchful, and not being thankful.

[ 28 : 10 ] But from the extraordinary thing, that God has done, and that God is doing. It's a marvellous circle, that if you are filled, with the knowledge of God's will, you cannot, but, be joyfully thanking him.

And if you really are, thanking him, how can you not be praying, that this marvellous work, and will of God, will come to its full effect, in you, your friends, your family, the people of the city, in this land, and in the whole world.

Paul says to us, as a congregation, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it, with thanksgiving. 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.

That I may make it clear, it is how I ought to speak. Let's pray.