

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Paul's Letter to the Colossians: Pray, Walk and Talk- Colossians 4:2-18

My wife child-minds Jack, who is ten months old. For the past two or three months now, he has been trying to get to his feet to walk. He has found his baby walker extremely useful in this respect, but he is best at sideways walking, along furniture and the like. But at the same time he has been frustrated in the sitting position, because he has been unable to crawl. We kept on telling him that "you have got to learn to crawl before you can walk". Eventually the penny dropped, and he now moves around the floor in a manner resembling a slug!

Today's message from Colossians 4:2-18 is called 'Pray, Walk and Talk'. In it Paul was not advising the Christians at Colosse that prayer precedes walk and talk. Rather it is that prayer, walk and talk are all necessary component parts of practical Christian life - they are on-going, cyclic activities.

Baby Jack is at the normal stage of development for a boy of his age. As you would expect, his five year old sister Emily, has no problems talking! (And she's quite a good walker). Luke, their older brother, is somewhat more advanced than either of them. They each will, in the course of time, grow up into adulthood, but they all will continue be involved in these activities of life, walking and talking.

Paul has been pressing similar ideas of Christian growth into maturity in this letter to the Colossians. In Colossians 1:9-10 he prays for them "...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Then in Colossians 2:6-7 "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." Here in Colossians 4:2 he says, "Continue earnestly in prayer...", which introduces our first watch word for today's message, 'pray'.

Pray

Now we know that Jack, Emily, and Luke will not continue to develop in life without constant attention to their well-being from their parents and from others, such as my wife. Similarly, without constant attention to prayer, the Christian will not be able either to develop or maintain those necessary characteristics of Christ - the "new man", as it is described in Colossians 3:10. These characteristics are vital for Christian witness, contrasting as they do with the old style of life lived before conversion. Colossians 3:10-4:1, remind us that these features are primarily seen in our church fellowships, our families, and in our secular work, and prior to Colossians 3:10, Paul has already stressed the necessity of personal piety. No wonder then that he now urges "Continue earnestly in prayer..." (Colossians 4:2). Prayer must form an integral part of the Christian's life in order for his walk and talk to be kept in line with the exhortation from Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Endurance in prayer

First of all, then, endurance in prayer is vital. I remember when one of my former Sunday School scholars was trying to assure me that he had not given up the Faith, that I asked him about his personal communion with the Lord. He had to admit that he no longer had a prayer life. A constant New Testament theme about the Christian faith is continuance, especially in prayer. For example: in Acts 2:42, where it is seen as one of the four pillars of church life "...they **continued steadfastly** in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers", in Romans 12:12 "...**continuing steadfastly** in prayer", and in the very first of Paul's letters, to a young church, the Thessalonians, he urges in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "pray **without ceasing**."

The struggle of prayer

Secondly, Colossians 4:2 indicates that prayer will always be a struggle, a battle that is constantly to be fought. Why? Because the enemy, the Devil, is continually trying to break through and break down any effective witness to Christ, particularly that demonstrated in practical Christian living.

Vigilance in prayer

Hence the need to be "*vigilant in [prayer]*" (Colossians 4:2). We are to be on our guard, on the lookout as to things in the world, happenings in society and in government, things affecting our families and churches, so that we are awake to every situation, and not taken by surprise by any event. On the contrary we should anticipate it by prayer with thanksgiving. Colossians 4:2 says "*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.*"

Thanksgiving

On the one hand, then, a state of spiritual alertness is required; on the other hand, our gratitude to God for every victory gained, and every provision of His grace, is also to be expressed. Thanksgiving is an aspect of prayer that can so easily be forgotten. But we can see from Paul's mention of it in this letter the importance which he gave to it. The references are Colossians 1:3,2; 2:7; 3:15, 17; and 4:2. And we are to remember that he wrote this instruction from a prison cell!

Praying for others

But prayer is not only to be made for ourselves, it is for others also. Paul enjoins the Colossians in Colossians 4:3-4 "*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, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.*" He knew that his own desire, stated in Colossians 1:28 "...*that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*", was insufficient without God's help. He wanted to be sure that, although he willingly laboured in this special stewardship, that this striving would be by God working mightily in him. The prayers of the Christians at Colosse were necessary in this respect. They were also to pray that Paul would fill out his ministry by fully preaching the truth about Christ, here called "*the mystery of Christ*" (Colossians 4:3). According to his explanation of his duties in Colossians 1:24-29, this meant that he had to explain in full the revelation of God. It was about the riches of the glory of this secret of the exalted Christ, not just the fundamentals of the gospel of His grace. So aware was he of this great commission that he never presumed, but always asked believers to pray: "that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:4)

Paul was also aware of the Enemy's action in trying to prevent the doors of the Gospel being opened. He refers in Colossians 4:3 to the fact that his imprisonment was on account of this mystery, "*for which I am also in chains.*" It has always seemed strange to me that men should shut up in prison the messenger carrying the best things from God, "*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Colossians 2:3). But I realise that it is the Devil's activity behind the scenes.

When we pray for the Lord's servants who are spreading the Word of God, it should also be along these lines. In this respect it is useful to have up to date information on their activities, with the accompanying successes and frustrations, such as we get in missionary prayer letters and lists. This information is somewhat easier to obtain in today's world of advanced communications, than it was here with Paul who had to send Tychicus with the news (see Colossians 4:7-9).

"*Watch and pray*" (Matthew 26:41, Mark 13:33, 14:38) are good watch words with which to conclude this consideration on prayer.

Walk

Next Paul exhorts the Colossians in Colossians 4:5 to "*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.*" This brings us to discuss our second watch word, walk. It is frequently used in the New Testament to describe the whole conduct of daily Christian life. Believers must be careful about the way they live. They must not convey a bad impression of the gospel because life is mainly lived out before unbelievers, or outsiders, as they are called here in Colossians 4:5.

The same kind of watchfulness that we saw was necessary for prayer is again called for in our walk. We have to "*redeem the time*" (Colossians 4:5), that is to look out for, seize and make good the opportunities for witnessing which come along day by day, not letting any of them slip by. Such opportunities no doubt equate to the "*open door for the word*" of Colossians 4:3. They are the possibilities of what God might do in or through us to present the claims of Christ to others. For example, I know a man who was constantly provoked by his workmates for his faith in Christ. An opportunity came one day, during an overtime late-shift, to respond directly to one of the most aggressive young men. That young man was soon convicted of his sins, and knelt down on the shopfloor in repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ!

Talk

Witness to Christ will definitely involve talk, our third watch word. As Colossians 4:6 states: "*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*" Our speech is never to be cheap or coarse, rather it must always bear upon it the stamp of the Gospel, that is grace. It should be appropriate as regards

the time, the place and the person, and should not compromise truth - it needs to be *"seasoned with salt"* (Colossians 4:6). Hence the general tone of our everyday communications, as well as what is said, must commend the Gospel so that people will ask about the hope that is in us. Let us be like the Master, who was *"full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). He always said the right things in the right manner, able to discern whether grace, or salt, or both, was necessary.

A casual reading of Colossians 4:7-18 may suggest that we have finished with our watch words. However we find rather the reverse is true. The different people mentioned here are living out practically both the meaning of these watch words and the rest of the teaching of the epistle. In Colossians 4:5-18 service is prominent now, just as witness was in the previous verses.

Tychicus

A lovely description of Tychicus is given in Colossians 4:7: a beloved brother, a faithful minister, a fellow servant. These show how he walked as a Christian. His task was to deliver the letter from Paul to the Colossians. Accompanying him was Onesimus, and together they were to bring the news about Paul. Not only could Tychicus' "talk" be relied upon in this respect, but such was his "walk" that he was given pastoral duties as well. In Colossians 4:8 Paul tells them *"I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts."* Tychicus was competent to assess their needs and to minister the Word to them.

Onesimus

Before leaving Colossians 4:9, we can see in Onesimus an example of the meaning of Colossians 1:13 *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."* Onesimus had been converted to Christ after running away from Philemon, his master, then meeting up with Paul in prison (see Philemon 8-16). Sin may have caused this slave to steal and run away, but God, as it were, picked him up and placed him down under the Lordship of Christ. His literal return from another country to his native country and to his master, would add to the understanding of the Colossians concerning this spiritual truth. It would also underline to them that they were all enslaved to Christ.

Mark, Luke Demas and others

It is good when the Lord's servants can team up together as Tychicus and Onesimus did. Aristarchus could not join them because he was a prisoner, like Paul (Colossians 4:10). However, along with his fellow Jews, Mark and Jesus, called Justus, he could send his greetings (Colossians 4:10-11). Not that the latter were not free to go, rather they were committed to stay to help Paul. Mark did have some plans to visit Colosse (Colossians 4:10), but these three servants had their eyes set on the future glory, they were working for the kingdom of God. So, in all of their movements, and for the timing of such, they subjected themselves to the will of God for their lives.

Colossians 4:14 adds Luke and Demas, Gentiles, to the greetings, which are sent also to "the brethren who are in Laodicea" and to Nymphas and *"the church in his house"* (Colossians 4:15). From the greetings list we see consistent conduct in the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14), failure but full recovery in Mark (see Acts 13:13, 15:37-39 and 2 Timothy 4:11), and a turning back into the world by Demas (See 2 Timothy 4:10). This raises the challenge with us: how committed are we to the service of God? And are we like Paul? - Appreciative of the help of a Luke, willing to forget the shortcomings of a Mark, and ready to grieve when a Demas lets us down.

Epaphras

Colossians 4:12 turns from the walking and talking of Paul's companions and messengers, to the prayers of Epaphras, who is described as *"our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf"* in Colossians 1:7. We are also told in Colossians 1:7 that he had brought the Gospel to Colosse and the surrounding districts, establishing churches there in the Lycus river valley. This is perhaps why he wanted them fully to grasp Paul's teaching and for it to become fully effective in their lives, *"that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"* (Colossians 4:12)

Key words

Here we can identify some of the key words of this epistle again. They are:

- Perfect
- Complete
- All; and
- Will.

The idea of being perfect is to be mature, fully grown, as we have mentioned from Paul's goal in Colossians 1:28 "every man perfect in Christ Jesus".

The thought of being complete occurs several times in the letter. They are "filled" (or filled full) in Colossians 1:9; "the fullness" in Colossians 1:19 and Colossians 2:9; "fulfil" in Colossians 1:25 and later in Colossians 4:17; "full assurance" in Colossians 2:2; and "complete" in Colossians 2:10 as well as here in Colossians 4:12. The fullness dwells in Christ, and we are complete in Him. God wants this enrichment to come out in our lives.

In Colossians 1:9 Paul himself had prayed for these believers in a general way that they would grasp the Will of God. This Will can be summarised using words from Colossians 1. They are in Colossians 1:18: "that in all things He [that is Christ] may have the pre-eminence" and in Colossians 1:27: "...Christ in you the hope of glory." Epaphras' intimate knowledge of his converts enabled him to pray in a specific way, that they would be in all the will of God. He knew their circumstances, the stage that they had reached in Christian development, the realm of their service, and he would be aware of the dangers of their being side-tracked by false teaching.

Growing to maturity

To illustrate, using baby Jack again, his parents wish to see him grow through all stages of babyhood and boyhood into a mature adult, who will fill out his place in society and realise his full potential. Crawling like a slug is only satisfactory for another month or so, when he can walk properly, and progress from there. They will be active in assisting him in every way, anxious to protect him from every danger, and careful to monitor his development. Similarly, Epaphras, a true spiritual father, was not content with anything less than the full knowledge of God's will and its full expression in the lives of these Lycus valley believers.

Notice again the persistent effort that is a feature of prayer. "...always labouring fervently..." (Colossians 4:12) means he overcame all difficulties, and with great zeal, gave himself totally to it. Epaphras had learnt how to pray in this intense way by praying with Paul. Colossians 2:1 tells of Paul's great conflict for this group of churches. Epaphras joined Paul in that same fight for those at Colosse, at Hierapolis and at Laodicea, that they might understand these secrets about Christ, that they might be bound together in love, and live in all the will of God.

In order to learn the truth of God and then to practise His will we need the word of God. Hence in Colossians 4:16 encouragement is given to these churches to use the Scriptures. They were enjoined publicly to read and to exchange the letters sent by the Apostles to each individual church, so as to be lacking in nothing. It has been well noted that if the Laodiceans had imbibed the teaching about Christ being everything from the Colossian epistle, they would have not been accused later of self sufficiency by the Lord Himself in Revelation 3:17. The prophetic nature of the letters to the churches in Revelation 2:1-3:22 makes us realise how much we need these Colossian truths today.

Archippus

The letter to Colosse ends on a very practical note with an individual, Archippus, singled out for special admonition. Colossians 4:17, "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfil it.'" Here we get that final use of the word complete or fulfil. We are not told the nature of his service, how much of it he was or was not doing, and whether he had been discouraged by something or someone. The point was that he had to get on and do it, emphasising again that fully discharging the will of God is the only practical response that will satisfy God. We need to take this exhortation to ourselves today, so that in our prayer life, in our walk, and in our talk we may likewise fulfil what we have received from the Lord, especially from our study of this epistle.

I'd like to end my talk with two quotations from Colossians 3. Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" and Colossians 3:23: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord..."

Let's pray:

God the Father, we thank You for placing us, by Your grace, in the kingdom of Your Son, whom You love. We thank You for the wonderful knowledge of Him and that Your will for Him is His pre-eminence. We pray that He might have this in our lives: that, in our walk and talk, we may bring honour and glory to Him, as we seek to fulfil Your will. We ask for these things in His Name, Amen.

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