

Colossians 4

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 15 June 2009 00:00

Perhaps it is not immediately obvious, but Colossians is a great example of practical teaching. Paul can write deep material, but here he is trying to guide the Colossians along the Christian path, for everyday life.

I once attended a church where the pastor spoke mainly to the students, in language few others could understand. He gave them theology without application, so his regular congregation hardly grew in stature. Paul is very down to earth! Though able to speak in theological terms, he is more concerned that people grow spiritually with practical counsel. It is why these studies always contain everyday applications.

He also asks for prayer, from those so led by God to do so, for we all need such support from each other. In this way, the mighty works of Paul are undergirded by the prayers of others. In my own ministry I am very aware of the prayer offered by the saints for me, and for the ministry. All pastors and teachers - all believers - need this support.

Verse 1

1.

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

We know from revelations in the news, that financial employers squander money they take from investors, particularly by paying top executives vast sums of money as 'bonuses', when all they do is their normal work.

Christian employers, however, are commanded to pay a fair day's pay for a good day's work. The pay should reflect what is suitable and fair. No Christian employer can justify paying below what is needed or fair, and should always seek the welfare of his workers. Also, workers should, as has been seen before, give not just good work, but work that is obviously of value, without laxity, with a good heart. In other words, both employer and employee must work as to the Lord, not to themselves.

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Employees should have what is just and equal, not be given unfairly different rates or perks based on favouritism. Note that this applies to Christian employers. He may have unsaved employees. Nevertheless, the same rule applies.

Verses 2 - 4

1.

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

2.

Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

3.

That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

The Colossians were to “continue in prayer” and to make sure that as they prayed they gave thanks to God for everything. To ‘continue’ is to be steadfast, to give attention to, to always be ready, to pray. ‘Prayer’ in this context refers to the act of prayer. There are different types of prayer. In this text we are told which it is – thanksgiving.

Paul asks that they should pray for them in Rome, asking God to give them ways to witness to the people there, spreading the Gospel, the same Gospel that put Paul into prison. Under house arrest, Paul was able to move about, but was restricted and guarded at all times. There are times when I have asked people to pray for me. Always, I add the proviso, that those who pray do so because God has prompted them. Thus, some will pray, and others will not. A prayer that does not come from God will never be heard by Him when it is uttered, because it is not genuine.

Verses 5 & 6

1.

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

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2.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

“Them that are without” refers to the unsaved, those outside the Kingdom. We are to live carefully before them, so that they only see God in us, and not sin or the usual ways of the world. Christians whose lives are handed over to Christ will find this far easier than Christians who are constantly trying too hard. This is because people whose hearts are not fully aligned with God will always rebel, or enter into sin often, but they complain that everything is so hard.

The reluctant Christian is one who wants to be holy, but does not really wish to give up sin. He only wants to push his foot on a gas pedal to drive fast in a straight line – he does not want to learn to drive, because he sees that as boring! Every Christian must learn how to live in Christ. There are no fast ways to do it, and no cutting corners! This takes humility and patience.

We must live Christian lives, holy and pure, whether or not people are watching us. If we only live as Christians when we are watched, then it is not our inward desire and, sooner or later, we will fall in a big way. Rather, we must inwardly seek God and give our lives to Him, so that it is our ‘natural’ way of living at all times. In this way we “redeem the time”. That is, we use our time in the best possible way, to God’s advantage.

Part of this holy living is the use of proper speech. The way we speak should always be with grace. Grace, charis, in the way we talk should reflect our inward desires and holy path. Thus, it ought mainly to be charming and delightful, and not nasty or selfish or rough-edged. Yet, it should also be “seasoned with salt”. Salt symbolizes making speech pure and wholesome, protecting it against what is wrong or sinful, showing wisdom in all things. This must, of necessity also include rebuke or stern response, when required. Thus, Christians must be ready to answer all men as needed, not patronizing them, or saying what they want to hear; always honest and true.

It is habitually taught to ‘trainee pastors’ in Bible colleges to just listen and to rarely give a personal view. They are told that it is best to let the other person chatter away, and for the

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pastor to say what is palliative or guarded. In this way few pastors say what is truly on their minds, and so avoid confrontation. This is not Christian fellowship, but manipulation of situations and 'man management'!

Verses 7 - 9

1.

All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord:

2.

Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;

3.

With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.

Tychicus ('fateful') was an Asiatic Christian, a companion of Paul. Paul said that he would pass on Paul's messages to the Colossians. He was trusted by Paul and was a fellow preacher and teacher, so would be a suitable emissary. He would also discover how the Colossians were and what they thought and did, being both a messenger and a comforter, bringing encouragement from Paul, and taking news back to him.

Tychicus was accompanied by Onesimus ('profitable' or 'useful'), Philemon's Christian slave. Though a slave he was highly regarded in the Christian community, and he was formerly of Colosse. Between them, they would instruct the Colossians in the ways of Christians. Today, this is missing from our local churches. Or, if it exists, it is very often partisan and dependent on the pastor's preferences, instead of on scripture itself.

Verses 10 & 11

1.

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Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

2.

And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.

Paul is now ending his discourse to the Colossians, and mentions others who help him in Rome. For example, Aristarchus ('the best ruler') of Thessalonica, who travelled with Paul on his third journey, and who was also a prisoner at Rome. Another mentioned is Marcus ('a defense'). That is Mark, the evangelist, who wrote the Gospel of Mark. In Latin his name was Marcus; in Hebrew it was John. A companion of Paul, his cousin was Barnabas. The Colossians were commanded to listen to him carefully, because he would bring them sound teachings.

Another companion was Jesus, "which is called Justus", a Jewish convert. 'Those I have mentioned', says Paul, 'are my constant companions and a comfort to me'. Whilst Paul was certainly highly regarded and a chief apostle, others helped him in the task of preaching the Gospel and teaching. Today, many preachers are placed on a pedestal, when, in fact, their role is merely that of delegates appointed to pass on the message from God. No one preacher or teacher is better than another, and it is sinful to put greater importance on one than on the other. All should take part in some way.

Verses 12 - 14

1.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

2.

For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

3.

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Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

Paul passes on the greetings of Epaphras, a fellow Colossian who constantly prayed for his kinsmen, that they would remain true to the God Who saved them. He had immense trust and love for the Colossians, and all who lived in the Lycos Valley. Luke 'the physician', who accompanied Paul everywhere, also sent his warmest greetings, along with Demas ('governor of the people'). This must have been before Demas suddenly returned to Thessalonica, because he could not cope with Paul's imprisonment.

Verses 15 - 18

1.

Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.

2.

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

3.

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.

4.

The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.

Paul finishes by asking the Colossians to greet the Lycos Valley inhabitants in his name, including a man named Nymphas ('bridegroom'), who was a wealthy Christian in Laodicea, holding church meetings in his house. There is nothing wrong with holding church meetings in homes! It is as valid as holding them anywhere else.

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After the letter was read out to the Colossians, said Paul, later read it out to the Laodiceans. And, in return, read their reply to the Colossians. In other words, each local church is joined by Christ and should know each other's mind. Paul wished, too, for a message to be given to one named Archippus ('master of the horse'). Evidently, he was a Christian teacher in Colosse, but was reluctant to perform the ministry given to him by God. He has received the calling, said Paul – remind him to comply!

Finally, Paul signs off his letter in his own handwriting, asking the Colossians to remember him in prayer, and blessing them in God's name. So be it.

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