

Colossians 4

Read Colossians 4:1: A big part of moving forward in our faith pertains to the little things that are in our control. We are so worried about how the authorities over our life will view us. We spend little time focusing on how much good we can do to those under our care, custody and control. This verse really should have been put into chapter 3; as it completes that chapter's thought. The chapters and verses are not part of the original inspiration of the scriptures.

When the books of the Bible were originally written, they did not contain chapter or verse references. The Bible was divided into chapters and verses to help us find Scriptures more quickly and easily. It is much easier to find "John chapter 3, verse 16" than it is to find "for God so loved the world..." In a few places, chapter breaks are poorly placed and as a result divide content that should flow together. Overall, though, the chapter and verse divisions are very helpful.

The chapter divisions commonly used today were developed by Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury. Langton put the modern chapter divisions into place in around A.D. 1227. The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 was the first Bible to use this chapter pattern. Since the Wycliffe Bible, nearly all Bible translations have followed Langton's chapter divisions.

The Hebrew Old Testament was divided into verses by a Jewish rabbi by the name of Nathan in A.D. 1448. Robert Estienne, who was also known as Stephanus, was the first to divide the New Testament into standard numbered verses, in 1555. Stephanus essentially used Nathan's verse divisions for the Old Testament. Since that time, beginning with the Geneva Bible, the chapter and verse divisions employed by Stephanus have been accepted into nearly all the Bible versions.

Read Colossians 4:2-4: The book of Acts is about actions. Prayer is where all of these actions are born. Somehow, we get caught up into the day's activity; and shortchange our petitions to God.

It is ironic that Paul was praying that the *door would be opened* for the gospel; and he was thrown into jail. I am sure that *open doors* were an appealing idea to Paul as he sat in jail. What was going through his mind? Was God doing the exact opposite of what Paul was praying for? God sent Paul out to spread the gospel; but then allowed him to be shut up in jail. It is counter-intuitive for sure. I have heard many stories about missionary families who had every form of resistance thrown at them. **God was forcing Paul to write it down and use messengers.** That delivery system memorialized our New Testament for all generations since. Does it ever seem like God is taking things in the opposite direction of your prayers?

Paul talks about praying continually, and watching for results, etc... This portion of the chapter does not jump off the page; but it does present questions for each of us.

To *continue* in prayer:

- To *be earnest* towards something
- To *persevere*
- *Constantly diligent*
- To *adhere closely*
- To *wait on continually*

To *watch* with thanksgiving:

- To keep aware
- To not sleep or *losing focus*

These very simple prayer requests, *to continue*, and *to watch* mentioned here are exactly what has stopped happening in the church today. We are sometimes sleeping (not focused); and not praying much.

We are like a frog slowly boiling in water. We may not sense any change. Our societal norms are moving rapidly away from what is godly behavior and away from biblical standards. The church is shrinking and losing its commitment. The church is less distinguishable from society.

The Bible lists a number of end-times church prophecies. One such prophecy is taking place in a big way before our very eyes. The Parable of the 12 Virgins is about the *mixed multitude* in the church pews who all look the same. In reality, many are not a genuine part of the church.

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.
(Matthew 25:1-12)

Showing up at church does not mean that you have a real relationship with God. The Parable of the 10 Virgins is about outwardly-indistinguishable church attendees. Some have *no oil*. The absence of oil means that the Holy Spirit is not working in their life. They are sleeping. There

is literally no spiritual activity taking place in their life. They are not growing in grace or pursuing God in earnest. That means that they are also ignorant because they are not even tuned into the current prophecies being fulfilled, or signs of the times. Being vigilant and tuned in goes with an ongoing spiritual walk. A sleeping church goer is literally dormant.

The standard for what we consider to be true Christian faith is slipping. The health of the church is getting weaker; and the numbers are dwindling. One lesser definition of faith is *the guy who keeps showing up*. People are not even showing up at church anymore. Our daughter serves in a nationwide college campus ministry. It is amazing to see what has happened in that arena in the last 8 years. Her chapter of CRU was 250 students strong at UCSB when she started. Today, they struggle to pull together 25 people. The same things are happening across the country in all campus ministries. Many college ministries have shrunk by at least 2/3 since before the beginning of Covid. The ability to meet together publicly was broken. The lifted quarantine has not restored anything to near prior levels. Within her own local ministry leadership group, the team has unraveled as well. One major leader had an affair and left his wife and daughter and turned his back on the church. Two other student leaders chose the lesbian lifestyle over the ministry and have disappeared. One main leadership couple felt the need re-enter the workforce (which is fine), but the remaining spouse became burned out. Today, they are not even attending church or interested in being a part of a Bible study. Their leadership group has dwindled down to a point where the students are going to have to do much of it themselves.

The church at large is also shrinking. National church attendance has shrunk by 1/3 in the last few years. There are several reasons:

- There have been a lot of government support programs and labor shortages, and people have found new ways to *skate* through life. The *desperation factor* is smoothed out.
- Kid's sports and extracurricular activities have displaced church attendance
- Our society is more mobile, and less connected to their local society
- Single-parent custody battles result in having *special* planned weekends; that are *too special* to spend in church
- The on-line church options are great for quarantines and convalescents; but they are not a good substitute for a healthy believer.

Our society has stopped waiting on God. They are at ease, or otherwise occupied. Where is this leading?

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)

What *falling away* are we talking about? In Greek the translation it is called *The Great Apostasy*. The biggest sign of the times is clearly how tolerant and complicit to sin our society has become. It is hard to understand how we now honor and encourage transgenders. It is ok for a biological male to use the women's restroom if he feels that he would like to be a girl. He can also compete in the Womens' 100-meter sprint if he is so inclined.

Prayer is where it starts to rebuild. Are my prayers only about me and my people? I do forget to pray for The Kingdom and Israel. Prayer seems to be something that ramps up and ramps down. I can end up with just a few brief prayer lines, if I am not careful. I find that I am forgetful to pray for the salvation of my co-workers as well.

This letter is about sobering up to the reality we are in. Colossians is about bringing truth to light to set people free. Unbelievers dismiss Christianity as a fairy tale. The Epicureans said that spirits and phantoms and spiritual things were made up. They only cared about satisfying themselves with food and drink and experiencing whatever they could. Even an unbeliever can see where that wanton lifestyle leads society. Look at Amsterdam or Bangkok or San Francisco. Those places are *train wrecks*.

The slippage in the church begins by feeling entitled to take our own path. We end up majoring in the minors. We are essentially salvaging a little bit of fleshly interest, to keep it interesting. That unhealthy provision grows and takes us away. We need to do the opposite. In a sense, the cross was the ultimate condemnation of their fleshly pagan lifestyles. Jesus nailed it for good. Anything the flesh and mind of man needs to be subordinated to the spirit life. Spiritual procrastination and conflicts are dangerous.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. (1 Samuel 15:23)

Idolatry comes in many flavors. They all are ultimately constructed by men to get them where they want to go. They are a license to sin. Many idolatrous temples incorporated mandatory prostitution; or partaking of mind-altering substances. Many idols conveniently kill or abuse unwanted persons. Some forms of idolatry appeal to intellectualism or piety or being the humblest. They are all self-imposed badges of merit. They all point to man being able to become more like a god. Paul is telling them that this is just more garbage to be thrown out of their mind. Christianity is an offense to our self-will.

Read Colossians 4:5-6: We have been dropped into society to influence it. We are to be *salt and light*. That means that we are here as preservatives, and we bring things to the awareness of others. Most of our interpersonal connections are with non-believers. Our lives should be a *platform for the gospel*. We cannot let our personalities derail the gospel delivery system. It has been said that people will not care what we know until they know that we care. I must be careful about this one. I can just dismiss the dissimilar interests of others and end up with

literally no connection. There is also nothing worse than having an unbeliever call you out on a moral issue.

Read Colossians 4:7-18: There are some church supporters mentioned in the closing of this book. They may have served the church continuously, but they just get a one-liner in scripture. Here is a little information about each one:

Tychius shows up in Paul's third missionary journey found in Acts 20. He was accompanying Paul to bring a financial gift from the church in Corinth to the church in Jerusalem. Tychius was called a true servant and a minister from Asia minor. He also spent time in jail with Paul. He was the hand-carry messenger of the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. Tychius also accompanied Onesimus (book of Philemon) the runaway Christian slave. Paul sent Tychius to relieve Timothy during Paul's second Roman imprisonment. He was considered a reliable witness, and a trustworthy friend.

Onesimus was a freed slave, who helped minister in the church. He was discussed in Philemon, and here he is accompanying Tychius.

Aristarchus was one of Paul's faithful traveling companions, who accompanied him on a couple of his journeys. He was a Macedonian who lived in Thessalonica. Like other co-workers in Christ, his name was included in the greeting in some of Paul's letters.

John Mark is normally just called Mark. He is only mentioned in Acts; and his mother's name is Mary. He is a helpful traveling companion of Barnabas and Paul. Mark left in the middle of one of the missionary journeys; but later returned to service. Barnabas valued Mark's help; while Paul felt that Mark had left his post. Mark authored the gospel of Mark. The repeated and unanimous testimony of the early Church describes Mark's Gospel as an accurate *record of Peter's teaching*, captured faithfully by Mark acting as *Peter's scribe*.

Epaphras was mentioned three times in scripture as a faithful minister. He shared the gospel with the Colossians; and perhaps was involved in starting the church there. He was also imprisoned with Paul. He was known to wrestle in prayer and work hard for the Kingdom.

Prisons were not typically places where people *served out a sentence* in those days. They were just holding tanks waiting for upcoming court cases or executions. I wonder if these guys were people Paul converted while in prison; or if they were just believers who got arrested. It would make his incarceration a training classroom.

Demas was a fellow worker during Paul's first imprisonment; and served some time with him during his second imprisonment.

Archippus was a young man given an assignment in his church at Colossae. He was connected to Philemon, if he was not also related to him.