

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6 | EXHORTATIONS

VERSE 2 - BLUE

In Colossians 4:2, Paul exhorts the Colossians to "continue in prayer." He assumes that a praying lifestyle is already in place and does not provide detailed instructions on how to pray. This simplicity suggests that prayer should not be overcomplicated. How should you pray? However you want to!

Paul's command to "watch in the same" is a directive to be watchful in prayer. The Greek word γρηγορέω [gregoreo] emphasizes alertness rather than mere eyesight. Our prayers should be focused, alert, and conducted "with thanksgiving." The English name "Gregory" comes from the Greek GREGOREO and means "watchful."

VERSES 3-4 - BLACK

I have color-coded this section in black to indicate that it is not a direct application for us. This is because it is a specific prayer for Paul and Timothy as his companion. These two have been deceased for nearly 2,000 years, and thus the prayer, directly anyway, cannot be answered.

The prayer is that Paul, who is "in bonds" (v. 3), would, along with Timothy, have an open "door of utterance" (v. 3) to make the "mystery of Christ" (v. 3) known.

This "mystery of Christ" is the pauline mystery (compare Ephesians 3:4). Paul says that he was "in bonds" due to this mystery (v. 4). This brings up a conflict with Paul's testimony in Acts 26:6. We know that the mystery was not previously known (Col. 1:26), but in Acts 26:6 Paul says that he was being "judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers." How can these different testimonies be reconciled?

There are a few options to consider when reconciling Paul's testimonies regarding his imprisonment:

1. **Metaphorical Interpretation:** We can take "in bonds" to be more metaphorical, such as "I am constrained to share the mystery." This interpretation is difficult in light of the way Paul uses the word elsewhere, where it is clearly meant to indicate physical imprisonment.
2. **Different Imprisonments:** We can surmise that there were two different imprisonments—one for teaching Jesus as the Christ in line with Old Testament teaching (Acts 26:6) and another for teaching the mystery of Christ. However, it is hard to imagine how teaching the mystery would get him arrested by the Jews and lead to an appeal to Rome. The Jews had little concern for and no jurisdiction over Gentile religions within the Roman Empire.
3. **Misunderstanding by Jewish Leadership:** We could surmise that the teaching of the mystery to Gentiles was misunderstood by Jewish leadership as being directed to Jews. Consequently, the Jewish leadership might have had Paul arrested for teaching Jews to disregard Jewish laws and customs, even though Paul insists he never did this (see Acts 26:20, 22).

This misunderstanding by the Jewish leadership provides a coherent explanation for the apparent discrepancy between Paul's statements in Colossians 4:3-4 and Acts 26:6. The Jewish leaders, concerned with preserving the law and Jewish identity, likely misunderstood Paul's proclamation of the mystery of Christ as a direct challenge to their religious traditions, leading to his imprisonment. This scenario aligns with the broader narrative of Paul's ministry and the consistent opposition he faced from those who felt threatened by the radical implications of his gospel.

VERSE 5 - BLUE

Paul transitions to discussing those who are "outside" (i.e., those who do not know the mystery of Christ as mentioned in verse 3) likely because he has emphasized the importance of making the mystery known. Believers are instructed to act wisely towards these individuals.

Part of this wise-walk is "redeeming the time." Essentially, all our time is spent in exchange for something valuable or needed, otherwise, it is wasted rather than redeemed. In this context, Paul specifically refers to the time spent with those who are outside of the knowledge of the mystery.

To determine the best use of our time with those who are unknowing, consider the following questions:

1. Do they have the prerequisite knowledge to understand the mystery? If not, it is more effective to explain God's work in previous dispensations first.
2. Do they possess a teachable spirit, or are they hindered by denominational or cultural biases that prevent them from understanding the Word of God literally? If they are not teachable, pray for an opening of their mind.
3. Is this the appropriate time or place to correct their thinking? A harsh or untimely response to error rarely brings about correction. Proverbs 25:11, along with verse 6, highlights the value of a well-timed and fitting word.
4. Are they eager to learn the content of the Word and to understand it clearly and simply? If so, investing time in them is highly worthwhile.

VERSE 6 - BLUE

Paul frequently emphasizes the importance of study and knowledge, but here he also highlights the need for grace in our speech. This aligns with the wisdom he mentions in verse 5. Just as Paul sought to speak the mystery as he ought (v. 4), he similarly urges his followers to know how they ought to respond to everyone. It's worth noting that the term "answer" in the Bible doesn't always necessitate a question; it often refers to addressing a given situation.

Our speech should be characterized by "grace, seasoned with salt." A very literal translation of this phrase would be "in grace with salt seasoned," underscoring the importance of both grace and salt in our words. This might suggest that our words don't always have to be "soft and sweet," nor should they always be "salty and sharp." Truly wise speech finds a balance between grace and salt.