

A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

WHATEVER YOU DO

We've all heard the saying, "Whatever you do, do it with all your might." Last Week, Paul turned that simple adage on its head, *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"* (3:17). We shouldn't *just* work hard, we should work *on purpose*. We don't work and sweat for coaches, teachers, and employers. We work for the Lord in everything. Paul's challenge applies to every corner of our lives. Anytime we want to cut corners or find the easy way, we should remember that we work for the Lord.

Immediately following that challenge, Paul applied that idea to the ancient household. Colossians 4:1 stuck with this household application, *"Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness, because you know that you also have a master in heaven."*

Wait, did Paul just command or at least permit slavery? No, but more on that next Week. This perspective was a major shift in the Roman view of slavery. It was a fresh concept that *all* people deserve "justice and fairness" because no human authority comes close to the Master in heaven.

As we will see next Week, there was one Colossian man receiving this letter who likely had a knot in his throat. Although we're not studying the final greetings, we learn that Paul sent back a runaway slave carrying the letter we call *"Colossians."* The slave Paul sent back to his master was named Onesimus who, in verse 9, Paul calls a "faithful and dear brother, who is one of you."

"Whatever you do" isn't only about work, it's also about forgiveness—about relationships. Every person is redeemable through Christ. Every person is useful. Every person deserves to be prayed for. Every person has value—even the people who you don't like, who hurt you, who take advantage of you. "Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

COLOSSIANS 4:2–6

² Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time pray for us too, that God may open a door for the message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may make it known as I should. ⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What are the reasons we don't share the gospel with our friends? We all have excuses, but ultimately it comes down to one word—fear. We're afraid of what they might think. We're afraid they might ask a question I don't know the answer to (BTW saying "I don't know, but I'll find out" doesn't hurt your witness. It strengthens it.) We're afraid that friendships will get ruined.

Is God big enough to trust him with our fears? Scan the QR code to learn to Share Jesus Without Fear.



DISCUSSION

How has God challenged you most in our study of *Colossians*?

ICEBREAKER

1. What is the 1st command and how should it be obeyed? (2)

2. For what did Paul ask for prayer personally? (3-4)

3. What two commands did Paul issue regarding personal conduct? (5-6)

OBSERVATION

4. How might our "walk" and "talk" be relevant to "outsiders."

INTERPRETATION

5. Back in Week 3 we asked about the 2-3 people you're praying for to know Jesus? How is that going? What strategic opportunities might exist to share?

APPLICATION

"Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks." To present the gospel, you need both. If you need help learning to share, talk to your coach today.

STUDY NOTES

LUCKY

Roman philosopher, Seneca, famously said, “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”

From our perspective, some people get lucky to become overnight successes. All we see is the success, not the work and struggle of preparation that allowed them to meet the opportunity. There is no major athlete that got a big-time deal after their first play. No musician went on a world-tour after picking up a guitar for the first time. What we see as luck is often the end of a very long road.

Paul had written to the Colossians to prepare them. He challenged their thinking about who they are and who Christ is. In today’s passage, as much as anywhere else in Scripture, we see Paul’s challenge of preparation in what they do. Today’s passage is only four verses, but if you act on Paul’s preparation, you’ll get the opportunity, and you’ll be super “lucky” witnessing God’s kingdom expand before your eyes.

UNITY WITH GOD CHANGES RELATIONSHIPS

Paul urged the Colossians to **be devoted to prayer**. Paul didn’t say, pray for your food or when you have an emergency. He said “be devoted to it.” We’re devoted to a lot of things. Prayer usually isn’t at the top of that list.

Regarding prayer, Paul urged **keeping alert in it**. I know some of pray every single day...at bedtime...while falling asleep. Don’t get me wrong, prayer is better than counting sheep—certainly more productive. However, this isn’t the kind of prayer Paul commanded. And hopefully, this isn’t the *only* kind of prayer you do.

When thinking of keeping alert, no passage captures this better than Jesus’ disciples falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane. Soon Jesus would be captured. He was praying alone and sweating blood in anticipation. He comes back to find his disciples asleep after asking them to pray. He asked them, “Couldn’t you stay awake with me for one hour?” (Matthew 26:40). Not long after, Jesus was arrested and executed.

We can only imagine that for the rest of their lives the disciples regretted that night. Had they known what was coming, do you think they’d have slept? No way! Here’s the thing, we don’t know what’s around the corner either. We must keep alert in prayer because we just don’t know what’s next.

Thanksgiving too should be a part of prayer devotion. This is sometimes challenging when life doesn’t seem to go our way. Let me urge you to start small—be thankful that you’re breathing—

look at what’s close to you and thank God for that. I often share of a short-term mission trip where I lived on concrete or dirt floors for about a week and a half. I came back thanking God earnestly for carpeted floors.

Paul told them what to pray. He asked the Colossians to pray for him, **that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may make it known as I should**. From prison, Paul asked prayers for boldness in sharing the message that landed him in prison. However, Paul didn’t want that message to come only from him. He went on urging the Colossians to **conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities**.

BELIEVERS SHOW WISDOM AND GRACE

Devotion to prayer, keeping alert, and thanksgiving are essential elements to prayer, but so is praying for the lost people around you. People outside of a relationship with Christ spend eternity in Hell. If the eternal suffering of people around you isn’t enough to motivate us to pray, what else is? But prayer alone isn’t enough.

The Bible is clear that believers have an obligation to take advantage of gospel opportunities when they appear (Romans 10:14–15). Yes, God can use unprepared people, but most often the people that get “lucky” are the ones that are prepared *before* the opportunity presents itself. Also, it’s amazing how people *get* more opportunities as they *pray* for more opportunities.

Beware the embedded warning on both sides of Paul’s command to make the most of opportunities. First, Paul said to **“conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders.”** If you act a fool, people don’t want what you got. I’m not saying you can’t have fun, but don’t destroy your witness. How you treat the opposite sex, the parties you attend, the media you consume, it all gets observed by non-believers. Christ is more and better than all the potential pleasures found in the abuses of those things—if people can’t see that you believe that, they won’t want your Jesus. In fact, loving sin unrepentantly more than Jesus should challenge us to ask if we really know him or not?

Finally, Paul challenges us with how we talk and even joke. Our speech should be **seasoned with salt**. Friends, when I was your age, I could have made a sailor blush. I’m not proud of it, but God has redeemed my language.

How you act and what you say determine how people see you—that’s what I mean by your witness. As we prepare our witness and opportunities arise, I pray we’re the “luckiest” people on the planet.