

THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Apostolic Counsel
Colossians 4:2-4

Consider -- the context.

1. The vital union of the believer with Christ is the ground for everything (3:1-4).
2. It is expected that the child of God is to share in the practical outworking of an identification with Christ (3:5-7). This involves “putting off” (3:8, 9) and “putting on” (3:10-14).
3. There is no lack of instruction regarding one's attitude (mental) and behaviour (somatic) as a Christian (3:15-17). This extends to marital, parental, and employment relationships (3:18-4:1).
4. The closing of this letter by the apostle Paul to the local church at Colosse is prepared by a word concerning prayer. Regrettably, prayer to God, so the Greek word here, is the missing link amongst professing Christians. While it is talked about, few actually practice it. This ought not to be. Give attention to the ingredients of prayer recorded here. This is the way to do it!

Check -- the teaching.

1. HOW to pray v. 2

a. Pray with perseverance

The verb is a present tense active voice imperative of a compound verb. The preposition included in the verb indicates “face to face” activity and direction. The root of the verb itself means “strength,” the sort which is demonstrated. The resultant meaning obviously emphasizes steadfastness, devotion, and constant attention. Make no mistake, prayer is real work and demands concentration of one's whole being -- if it matches this verb! Check these other references of its use: Mark 3:9; Acts 2:14; 2:42; 6:4; 5:13; 10:17; Ro. 12:12. Prayer is not play!

b. Pray with watchfulness

Too often prayer is mechanical or is attended by confused thoughts. For some it is associated with realization and even sleep. This present tense middle voice participle is very meaningful. Unless prayer is engaged with this perspective, one wonders about its effectiveness. Active, cautious, and strict attention are surely basic to the meaning of the verb. Middle voice adds the personal touch to it.

c. Pray with thanksgiving.

What a pleasant surprise to find this with prayer. The original root of the noun comes from a compound verb which transliterated is “eucharist.” The Lord's Supper is the highest act of “thanksgiving” for the highest benefits a believer receives from the Lord. Prayer is to be made “with thanksgiving” as grateful acknowledgment of past mercies and for those being sought (cf. Phil. 4:6; Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18; 1 Tim. 3:1). To include

thanksgiving in one's prayer is not a cliché, but obedience to Scripture. Therefore, it is the Bible which says prayer is “with thanksgiving.”

2. WHOM to pray for v. 3

a. Pray corporately

Two three letter Greek words make this clear. They are translated “withal” “and.” The reference of the Spirit, therefore, is that prayer is inclusive of many people. The basis for “withal” is clearly pluralistic (Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 4:17; 5:10; 13; Philemon 22).

b. Pray individually

“For us” must have reference to Paul, Ephaphras, Tychicus, etc. Prayer lists are herewith suggested. This brings prayer into focus as well as allowing it a wide sweep.

3. WHAT to pray for vv. 3, 4

Two purpose clauses and a purpose infinitive are employed to indicate the direction of prayer for the Colossian believers and by extension present-day believers.

a. What is wanted

This is contained in the phrase “that God would open unto us a door of utterance.” It is God Who performs this supernatural work (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Rev. 3:8). Let's not dilute the sovereignty of God! He opens and closes doors. “Utterance” is the noun “word,” hence the basic request is an open door for the Word of God. Those who preach are to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2) -- full stop!

b. What is spoken

The “mystery of Christ” is a pregnant Biblical concept. It refers to the fact that Jew and Gentile are in one Body through the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 2:12-22; 3:1-11). Regrettably, this great Pauline (plus apostles, Eph. 3:5) doctrine became a problem. On account of Paul's teaching of this truth. He was put in “bonds.” This perfect passive verb “being in bonds” shows this is the case right up to that moment! Most of us have not suffered in this way for the Word of God! Many do suffer for doctrinal issues, as this one, but not unto “bonds.”

c. What is obligated

For some there is the possibility to be a “secret Christian.” Not so in this text. The verb “manifest” means to make known or visible. The prayer for which Paul asks concerns an open, honest to goodness expression (speak) of a despised doctrine -- the fact of Jews and Gentiles being in one Body (the mystery of Christ).

Conclude -- the message.

The interpretation is obviously local for Paul and the Colossian believers. But, being a part of the Bible, the truths mentioned here are for all believers profitable (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). So be it!