

# Colossians – Lesson 10

## Paul's Final Instructions

### Read Colossians 4:2-6

1. (a) For what, *specifically*, does Paul ask his Colossians brothers and sisters to *pray*? In what *situation* does Paul find himself, and *how* could this prayer be answered by the Lord?

Paul, being imprisoned in Rome at the writing of the letter, asks for his Colossian brothers and sisters to pray that God may “*open to us a door for the word.*” Specifically, new opportunities to preach the “*mystery of Christ*” (i.e., the gospel message of salvation), even though Paul is “*limited*” by being under house arrest. Paul is *probably* asking the Colossians for 1) freedom, which would allow him to continue to travel preaching and teaching throughout the empire, and/or 2) those who are a part of his “*team*” to be given new opportunities to present the gospel wherever *they* may go. Either way, Paul desires for the Colossian church to pray for the gospel to go throughout the world.

- (b) What does Paul mean when he instructs them to “*walk in wisdom towards outsiders*” (4:5)?

To walk in wisdom is to act in ways that are consistent with what one knows, given that wisdom is the *practical application of knowledge*. Since they know the truth of the gospel, Paul is instructing them to walk in a manner that makes that knowledge *visible*; to act *consistently* under the message of Christ before those who are *not* a part of the church (i.e., unbelievers). This would be known as *winsomeness*: being “*attractive*” before others by virtue of one's behavior; to *adorn* the gospel before the world with a true sense of commitment to it.

- (c) How does one let his or her speech be “*seasoned with salt*” (4:6)? Give some *practical* examples of how this is done in attempting to “*answer each person.*”

In the First Century, salt had a number of purposes, each of which is considered here *metaphorically*: 1) salt *seasoned* food to make it more palatable; the Christian is to “*season*” his words such that they are pleasant and rich, making them more “*palatable*” to others; 2) salt acted as a preservative; the Christian is to “*preserve*” his testimony by speaking in a way that is consistent with his beliefs, and he was to act as a “*preservative*” before the world by using his language such as to lead others to faith in Christ; and 3) salt was (sometimes) a “*poison*” (i.e., as in “*salting*” land to make it incapable of growing crops); the Christian may (at times) be called upon to use his language to rebuke and correct, in a loving fashion. In “*answering*” each person, Paul is *undoubtedly* referring to *apologetics*: making a defense for the faith over against the objections of the doubter or cynic. Language is a *key way* by which such an answer is given: speaking in words that make the gospel sweeter and more appealing; calling men to repentance, using words that may be a bit “*salty*”; and “*preserving*” a testimony by making known central tenets of the Christian faith to those that may not know them or believe them.

### Read Colossians 4:7-18

2. *Who* does Paul indicate will tell the Colossians about what is happening to him (4:7-9)? Locate other references to *these* individuals in the New Testament, and sketch a brief *biography* of each.

Paul indicates that Tychicus and Onesimus will be the ones to deliver this letter and give the Colossian church a report on the situation with Paul. Tychicus was a faithful helper to Paul, probably from Ephesus (first mentioned amongst the brethren in Acts 20:4), and a messenger to the Ephesian church (Ephesians 6:21) with that letter (and this one!). Tychicus was sent by Paul to Ephesus to help Timothy there (2 Timothy 4:12) while Paul did some final travelling before his death, and was probably sent to Titus on Crete for similar purposes (Titus 3:12). Onesimus is *probably* the runaway, but now converted slave of Philemon mentioned in that letter (Philemon 10), being sent back to Asia Minor with Tychicus and these letters.

3. (a) Compare the reference in 4:10 of “*Mark the cousin of Barnabas*” to Acts 13:13 and 15:36-41. Why is this reference to Mark so significant *here*? What does Paul believe *might* happen with him?

John Mark went out originally with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary trip from Antioch into central Asia Minor (i.e., to the Galatian churches). However, when the team arrived at Perga in Pamphylia, Mark *abandoned* the team and returned to Jerusalem. No reason is given for his abrupt departure, but it is *assumed* that he was ill-prepared for the journey, being young and immature in the faith. Later, after the Jerusalem council, when Barnabas wished to bring Mark along on a second journey into central Asia Minor, Paul refused, and the disagreement between them sparked a “divergence”, whereas Barnabas took his cousin to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas and returned to the churches around Antioch of Pisidia. Thus, this reference to John Mark being *with* Paul in Rome is significant: apparently, Paul and Mark had “mended” their relationship, with Mark becoming an important part of the team. Paul even seems to be entertaining plans to send Mark to Colossae with a further report from Rome.

(b) In 4:11, what does Paul mean that Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus (Justus) are the only men “of the *circumcision*” with him? Why is this *important*?

To be men “of the *circumcision*” is probably a reference to *Jewish* believers that had become a part of the missionary team of Paul, fellow Jews who had come to faith in Christ *even after* having been circumcised as Jews earlier in life. This is important because Paul was, *primarily*, an apostle to the Gentiles (i.e., uncircumcised non-Jews); having a few Jewish Christians amongst the team implies that Paul had become “comfortable” with fellow Jews preaching the gospel to Gentiles. It might *also* imply (given that only three are mentioned), that the vast majority of Paul’s friends (at this point) were Gentiles, a situation that is *ironical*, given that Paul had (at the beginning) considered himself a “proper” Jew (i.e., one that didn’t associate with Gentiles).

4. (a) Who is *Epaphras* (4:12f cf. 1:6)? How does Paul *praise* the man? For what had he been “*struggling*?”

Epaphras is *probably* a man from Colossae who had been converted under Paul’s preaching in Ephesus, and had followed him to Rome, giving to Paul a report of the believers in Colossae *that he had helped to form*. Paul praises his *struggle* to see that the gospel is fully formed in and around his home town, and that Epaphras’ goal was to see the Colossian church mature and stand firm in the faith.

(b) From 4:14, who is “*Luke the beloved physician*?” In what ways might he have been *ministering* to Paul in his current circumstances?

Luke, the beloved physician, was probably from the area of Troas, in western Asia Minor, He had joined Paul and his missionary team on their second journey around the mid-continent as they embarked west into Macedonia. Church tradition assumes that Luke wrote both the gospel of that name, and the book of Acts. The change in pronouns in Acts 16:11 from third person to first person indicates that the writer joined the team at that point in the narrative. Luke, therefore, had followed Paul all the way to Rome and may have written much of the book of Acts from there while Paul was imprisoned.

5. (a) Who is *Nympha* (4:15f)? *Where* is her church? What *relationship* existed between the church at Laodicea and the one at Colossae? What did Paul want to *happen* in both?

Since there is no other reference to *Nympha* in the NT, the only information we have on her is here: she apparently hosted a church in her house, probably in Laodicea. In fact, the implication of the verse is that the “*brothers at Laodicea*” were a part of her house-church, making *her* home the location of the Laodicean church itself. The letter he refers to in 4:16 (probably the encyclical Ephesians) was to be read at that church, and also at Colossae (and vice-versa), implying that the two towns were close together and had some sort of connection to one another. In other words, Paul wanted *both letters* to be read in *both churches*, so that each church could benefit from them both.

(b) What do *you* think Paul means in urging Archippus to “*fulfill*” his ministry (4:17)?

Although the exact *nature* of the ministry of Archippus is unknown, it is *undoubtedly* a part of the preaching of the gospel around Colossae. Given that Paul instructs *them* to tell Archippus to fulfill his ministry, it is *highly likely* that Archippus was a member of the Colossian church, and may have had a leadership role in the church that he was either falling down in or not taking seriously enough (i.e., maybe Epaphras had told Paul about the man and his failures). Either way, Paul exhorts *the church* to do this, a form of *church discipline* (although minor).

6. How does Paul *sign* the letter (4:18)? What does he mean by “*remember my chains?*”

Paul signs the letter *directly*; he was probably using an *amanuensis*, and took the pen from him to sign the letter at the end to demonstrate that it truly was from him (i.e., using a secretary was a common practice by Paul; see Romans 16:22). To say to his Colossian brothers “*remember my chains*” was not to imply they might *forget* that he was imprisoned. Rather, it was to ask them to continue to pray for his *release*; since he was still imprisoned, he simply desired for them to remember him in prayer, that the Lord would release him to continue his mission of preaching the gospel. Remember: Paul had started this pericope in asking for this same thing (see 4:3).