

**Greek NT**

4.2 Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκατερέιτε, γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, 4.3 προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, 4.4 ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι. 4.5 Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι. 4.6 ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἄλατι ἠρτυμένος, εἶδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

**Gute Nachricht Bibel**

2 Lasst nicht nach im Beten, werdet nicht müde darin und tut es immer mit Dank! 3 Betet dabei auch für uns, dass Gott uns eine Tür öffnet für seine Botschaft. Wir sollen ja das Geheimnis bekannt machen, das in Christus beschlossen ist. Als Verkünder dieses Geheimnisses sitze ich hier im Gefängnis. 4 Bittet Gott darum, dass ich es weiterhin offenbar machen kann, wie es mein Auftrag ist.

5 Im Blick auf die, die nicht zur Gemeinde gehören, und im Unterschied zu ihnen sollt ihr leben wie Menschen, die wissen, worauf es ankommt, und sollt die Zeit, die euch noch verbleibt, gut ausnutzen. 6 Wenn ihr Außenstehenden über euren Glauben Auskunft gebt, so tut es immer freundlich und in ansprechender Weise. Bemüht euch, für jeden und jede die treffende Antwort zu finden.

**NRSV**

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4 so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

**NLT**

2 Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. 3 Don't forget to pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to preach about his secret plan -- that Christ is also for you Gentiles. That is why I am here in chains. 4 Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.

5 Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone.

**The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>****1. What did the text mean to the first readers?**

With this final pericope of moral admonition the paraenetical section of 3:1-4:6 comes to a close. This section contains miscellaneous encouragements to Christian living in a manner rather typical of much of the paraenesis found both inside and outside the pages of the New Testament. The emphasis falls upon reaching up to God in prayer and reaching out to non-believers in a positive manner.

Also important is the Ephesian parallel in 6:18-20 (NRSV):

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare

<sup>1</sup>Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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it boldly, as I must speak.<sup>2</sup>

The similar language coming in a text in the same position in the Ephesian letter as 4:2-6 is in the Colossian letter makes it a significant text to compare. All the more so, since Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were bundled together to be read in the churches together.

### Historical Context:

The time / place references in these verses are minimal, but do contain some important references. Particularly important is the reference to Paul's imprisonment. He describes himself as being in 'chains' and asks for prayer that God will help him proclaim the gospel effectively while imprisoned.<sup>3</sup> Throughout our study we have worked upon the hypothesis that the most likely scenario for his imprisonment was Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast where Paul spent a little over two years under Roman imprisonment while awaiting the outcome of the charges brought against him by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> The level of custody that Paul experienced here is described in Acts 23:31-26:32. Specific references to his imprisonment include:

Acts 23:35b (NRSV): "Then he [Felix, the Roman governor] ordered that he [Paul] be kept under guard in Herod's headquarters" (κελεύσας ἐν τῷ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρώδου φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτόν).

Acts 24:2a (NRSV): "When Paul had been summoned,..." (κληθέντος δὲ αὐτοῦ...).

Acts 24:23 (NRSV): "Then he [Felix, the Roman governor] ordered the centurion to keep him in custody, but to let him have some liberty and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care of his needs" (διαταξάμενος τῷ ἑκατοντάρχη τηρεῖσθαι αὐτόν ἔχειν τε ἄνεσιν καὶ μηδένα κωλύειν τῶν ἰδίων αὐτοῦ ὑπηρετεῖν αὐτῷ).

Acts 24:24 (NRSV): "Some days later when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him speak concerning faith in Christ Jesus" (Μετὰ δὲ ἡμέρας τινὰς παραγενόμενος ὁ Φῆλιξ σὺν Δρουσίλλῃ τῇ ἰδίᾳ γυναικὶ οὖσῃ Ἰουδαία μετεπέμψατο τὸν Παῦλον καὶ ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ περὶ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν πίστεως).

Acts 24:27 (NRSV): "After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and since he wanted to grant the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison" (Διετίας δὲ πληρωθείσης ἔλαβεν διάδοχον ὁ Φῆλιξ Πόρκιον Φῆστον, θέλων τε χάριτα καταθέσθαι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὁ Φῆλιξ κατέλιπε τὸν Παῦλον δεδεμένον.).

Acts 25:6-7a (NRSV): "6 After he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 When he arrived,..." (25.6 Διατρίψας δὲ ἐν



Roman bema

<sup>2</sup>GNT: 6.18 διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκατερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων 6.19 καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα μοι δοθῇ λόγος ἐν ἀνοιξίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 6.20 ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι.

<sup>3</sup>"Prison" most frequently renders GK *phylakē*. The Greek term may refer to the action of guarding, the person who guards, a period of time for guarding (i.e., guard duty), or the place of guarding (the primary NT use). Also translated as 'prison' are GK *desmōtērion* and *tērēsis*. The former refers to a place of confinement, such as the places used for John the Baptist (Mt. 11:2), the apostles (Acts 5:21, 23), and Paul and Silas (16:26). The latter term (which is synonymous with *desmōtērion* in Acts 5:21, 23) occurs in Acts 5:18 in the phrase *en tērēsei dēmosia*, which the RSV and AV render "in the common prison" (NEB "in official custody"). GK *dēmosia* may be either an adverb or an adjective; consequently, the apostles were either put in prison publicly or they were put into a public prison (i.e., a prison belonging to the government). In Col. 4:3 the AV "in bonds" for GK *dēō* is perhaps more distinct and preferable to the RSV "in prison," since Paul in Col. 4:18 leaves no doubt that he is actually in chains (R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* [NCBC, repr 1981], p. 126). The part of *syndēō* in He. 13:3, rendered "in prison with them," implies a sharing in the sufferings of those in prison even if only by "exercising imaginative sympathy" (F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews* [NICNT, 1964], p. 392).

"Prisoner" most often translates GK *dēsmios*, which refers to persons either bound by chains or confined by walls. It applies to prisoners in general (e.g., Acts 16:25, 27; He. 10:34), to Paul in particular (Acts 23:18; 25:14, 27; 28:17), and also to Paul when he designates himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1; Philem. 1, 9; cf. 2 Tim. 1:8; also M. Barth, *Ephesians* [AB, 1974], I, 359–362). [Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 3: 973-75. S.V., "Prison," by G.L. Knapp.]

<sup>4</sup>This Caesarea was known as Caesarea Maritima, the city of Herod. Herod the Great built this port city in the later years of the first century before Christ (appx. 25-13 BCE). The city served as the seat of the Roman *praefecti* during the beginning of Christianity. It was the place of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius (cf. Acts 10), and Paul's lengthy imprisonment after his arrest in Jerusalem and prior to his being taken to Rome to stand before the Roman emperor Nero (Acts 23-26). In later centuries the city became of major center of Christian activity in the eastern Mediterranean world.

αὐτοῖς ἡμέρας οὐ πλείους ὀκτῶ ἢ δέκα, καταβὰς εἰς Καισάρειαν, τῇ ἐπαύριον καθίσας ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἐκέλευσεν τὸν Παῦλον ἀχθῆναι. 25.7 παραγενομένου δὲ αὐτοῦ...).

Acts 25:21 (NRSV): “But when Paul had appealed **to be kept in custody** for the decision of his Imperial Majesty, **I ordered him to be held** until I could send him to the emperor” (τοῦ δὲ Παύλου ἐπικαλεσαμένου τηρηθῆναι αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ διάγνωσιν, ἐκέλευσα τηρεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ἕως οὗ ἀναπέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς Καίσαρα.).

Acts 25:23 (NRSV): “So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and **Paul was brought in.**” (Τῇ οὖν ἐπαύριον ἐλθόντος τοῦ Ἀγρίππα καὶ τῆς Βερνίκης μετὰ πολλῆς φαντασίας καὶ εἰσελθόντων εἰς τὸ ἀκροατήριον σὺν τε χιλιάρχοις καὶ ἀνδράσιν τοῖς κατ’ ἐξοχὴν τῆς πόλεως καὶ κελεύσαντος τοῦ Φήστου ἦχθη ὁ Παῦλος.).

Acts 27:1 (NRSV): “When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, **they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius.**” (Ὡς δὲ ἐκρίθη τοῦ ἀποπλεῖν ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν Ἰταλίαν, παρεδίδουν τὸν τε Παῦλον καὶ τινὰς ἑτέρους δεσμώτας ἑκατοντάρχη ὀνόματι Ἰουλίῳ σπείρης Σεβαστῆς.).

From the picture that emerges out of these references one can see that Paul experienced a level of custody rather typical for Roman citizens of that time. He was placed in the custody of a Roman centurion who was responsible for Paul. The location of his imprisonment was the *praetorium* of Herod (ἐν τῷ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρώδου), i.e., the official residence of the governors in the city. The Roman military officer was personally responsible to keep the prison secure and also available at any time for appearing before the Roman governor. As Acts 24:23 suggests, Paul had some freedom and friends were permitted to bring him supplies and food. This relative freedom enabled Paul to receive friends, dictate letters etc. while waiting on the outcome of his trial.

#### Outline of Colossians

Additionally the indirect allusion to Christians using wisdom in relating to the non-Christian world around them carries with it some issues of the precise nature of feeling about Christians present in Colossae at the time of the writing of this letter in the late 50s of the first Christian century. Was there a hostile attitude? An attitude of indifference? One of curiosity? Gaining some insight here helps one develop a better understanding of Paul’s language of ‘redeeming the time’ (τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι). Although Paul was experiencing persecution largely from Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, the atmosphere in the Lycus valley toward Christianity doesn’t seem to be characterized by hostility from either the local Jewish leaders or from the Roman government. Although one cannot say with certainty that this was the situation, the mostly indirect signals from Colossians and Philemon suggest this to have been the case in the late 50s.

#### Literary Aspects:

As is always the case, the literary aspects play an important role in the interpretive process here.

#### Literary Form:

Col. 4:2-6 stand as a part of the letter body, implying that the specific content is dictated by the perceived needs of the initial readers of the letter. Additionally, the passage falls under the genre of epistolary paraenesis, i.e., moral admonitions to the readers regarding issues in daily living.

#### Literary Setting:

From the outline on the right, one can sense better the literary context for 4:2-6. It stands as the final paraenetical segment in 3:1-4:6. As such it is built off the foundational principles in 3:1-4 advocating the Christian life as seeking the things above and not

#### Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2  
Superscriptio: 1:1  
Adscriptio: 1:2a  
Salutatio: 1:2b

#### Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

#### Body

Intercession: 1:9-12  
Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20  
Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul’s Ministry 1: 1:24-29  
Paul’s Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15  
Christian Living 2: 2:16-19  
Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4  
Christian Behavior: 3:5-11  
Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1  
Husband/Wife: 3:18-19  
Father/Children: 3:20-21  
Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

#### Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9  
Greetings: 4:10-17  
Closing: 4:18  
Letter Validation: 4:18a  
Prayer Request: 4:18b  
Benedictio: 4:19c

the things on the earth.

Additionally, many scholars call attention to the common language of 3:16-17<sup>5</sup> and 4:2-6. The worship tone of both, especially with the emphasis upon corporate prayer seems to form a 'ring' around the family code section in 3:18-4:1. Although all the implications of this are not clear, at least the instruction about family life in the Christian home is set in the context of the worship of God by the church. An integral connection between home and church is highlighted. One can't function well without the other. And both need to nourish the other in a unified desire to honor God and to advance the cause of Christ.

Also, Paul frequently closes out the paraenesis material in his letters with a 'random' section of moral admonition.<sup>6</sup> Thus this passage signals that the apostle is quickly coming to the end of his letter, and is seeking to 'tie together some loose strings' before concluding his letter to the Colossians. Given this aspect one should be hesitant to see a close internal connection between the admonitions found inside the passage.

### **Literary Structure:**

The visual presentation of the thought flow through the block diagram of the original Greek text highlights the inner connectedness of the primary and secondary ideas in the text. The English translation of that text illustrates this structure in translation.

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4.2      With prayer
53  persevere
      watching
      in it
      with thanksgiving,
4.3      praying
      at the same time also
      for us,
      that God may open to us a door
      for the Word
      for me to speak the mystery of Christ,
      because of which I also am in chains,
4.4      that I will make it clear
      as it is necessary for me to speak.

4.5      In wisdom
54  be walking
      toward those on the outside
      redeeming the opportunity.

55 4.6 Let your word be
      always
      with grace,
      seasoned with salt,
      so that you may know
      how it is necessary for you to answer each one.
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Clearly the text divides naturally into two units: statement 53 (vv. 2-4) and statements 54-55 (vv. 5-6). This has occasionally been labeled by commentators as 1 "Talking to God about others" and 2 "Talking to others about God." Clearly the first emphasis is upon prayer, and the need to pray with insight and alertness. It also includes intercessory prayer especially for the apostle that he can effectively use the opportunity of imprisonment to advance the cause of Christ.

The second unit in vv. 5-6 stresses relationships of believers to the outside world. Wisdom is to be used in relating to them and wise speech also. In so doing a solid Christian witness can be presented to non-believers.

<sup>5</sup>NRSV: "16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

<sup>6</sup>"As in other Pauline letters this indicates that the letter is drawing to a close and matches the prayer of the opening (1:3, 9-10/4:2-4; Rom. 1:9-10/15:30-32; Phil. 1:9-11/4:6; 1 Thes. 1:2-3/5:17, 25; 2 Thes. 1:3/3:1-2; Phm. 4-6/22; also Eph. 1:15-23/6:18-20); once again Eph. 6:18-20 is particularly close to Col. 4:2-4." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 261.]

## Exegesis of the Text:

The twofold exegesis of the text is based upon the above understanding of the natural divisions in the text.

**Using prayer, vv. 2-4:** “2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4 so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.” (4.2 Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε, γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, 4.3 προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλήσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι’ ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, 4.4 ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλήσαι.).

Important to examine in comparison is the parallel text in Eph. 6:18-20:

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.<sup>7</sup>

Coming at the exact same place in the Ephesian letter as does 4:2-6 in the Colossian letter,<sup>8</sup> this text stands as a companion expression to the Colossians admonition on praying. Both advocate prayer as critical to the life of the believing community.<sup>9</sup> Both also appeal to the readers to pray for the imprisoned apostle Paul to be able to speak with boldness the ‘mystery’ of the gospel / of Christ.

One should note the focus on the believing community as a group with this appeal.<sup>10</sup> Not just in individual prayer in devotional practice, but the corporate community of the church especially should give high priority to praying.

The core admonition in Colossians 4:2 is simply “Devote yourselves to prayer” (Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε). Peter O’Brien (*WBC*) provides helpful comment here:<sup>11</sup>

The congregation is exhorted to constant prayer. The verb προσκαρτερέω, which means to “adhere to,” or “persist in,” came to be used of a boat that always stands ready for someone (Mark 3:9), or an activity that one was devoted to or busily engaged in. It was in this latter sense that it came to be employed to denote continuance in prayer (Acts 1:14; Rom 12:12; Col 4:2; cf Acts 2:42, 46) and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4; on the term and its cognate προσκαρτέρησις, “perseverance,” “patience,” see BAG, 715, Grundmann, *TDNT* 3, 618–20, and R. Kerkhoff, *Das unablässige Gebet. Beiträge zur Lehre vom immerwährenden Beten im Neuen Testament* [Munich: Zink, 1954] 39, 40). Here the injunction suggests determination in prayer, with the resolve not to give up (Luke 11:5–13) or grow weary (Luke 18:1–8). The content of this prayer (τῇ προσευχῇ) is not specifically mentioned, so it is sometimes assumed that all types of prayer are covered by the term. However, although προσευχή is, on occasion, used of prayer in general, in both Old and New Testaments it regularly signifies petition (1 Sam 7:27; cf. v 29; 2 Kings 19:4; 20:5; Pss 4:1; 6:9, etc; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:31; 12:5; Rom 1:10; 15:30; James 5:17; in many other instances in the Greek Bible where it has been argued that προσευχή, “prayer,” and its cognate verb προσεύχομαι, to “pray,” bear a general sense of prayer, a case can be made for the rendering “petition”). Such a meaning fits the immediate context well. Since thanksgiving is to be an accompaniment of this prayerful activity then the thanksgiving itself (ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ) is not included in the term

<sup>7</sup>GNT: 6.18 διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκαρτερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων 6.19 καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα μοι δοθῇ λόγος ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 6.20 ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλήσαι.

<sup>8</sup>Note even further the parallel concerning Tychicus that follows in both letters. This will be explored further in the next study in Colossians:

Col. 4:7-9 (NRSV): “7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.”

Eph. 6:21-22 (NRSV): “21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts.”

<sup>9</sup>“As the letter opening began with assurance of Paul’s prayer for the Colossians, so the main section concludes with Paul’s encouragement that they should be faithful in prayer, for him as well (4:3). Here again we may take it for granted that this was no mere formality but an expression of the indispensability of prayer for Paul and the early Pauline mission; even in this letter we are still in the earliest years when traditions were being created and not merely parroted.” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 261]

<sup>10</sup>The second person plural form of the Greek verbal expressions uniformly stresses the group responsibility.

<sup>11</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 238.

προσευχή (“prayer”; against Conzelmann, TDNT 9, 414). Also the following participle προσευχόμενοι (“praying,” v 3), which spells out the content of Paul’s prayer request of the Colossians for himself and other messengers of the gospel, directs our attention to a particular form of petition, that is, intercession. The Colossian Christians are to persevere in petitionary prayer.

At the beginning of the letter,<sup>12</sup> Paul affirmed his continual praying for the Colossians with thanksgiving and petition. Now he urges the Colossians to engage in the same kind of praying so that God’s work can advance. Every kind of praying is most likely in mind with petition and intercession especially in focus. The Ephesian parallel clearly specifies this (Eph. 6:18): “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.” When the church prays under the leadership of the Holy Spirit,<sup>13</sup> as Paul admonishes in Ephesians, it will voice the proper kinds of prayers to the Lord.

He qualifies this core admonition with the encouragement to be watchful in their praying and to base their praying in thanksgiving: “keeping alert in it with thanksgiving” (γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ). The sense of watchfulness (γρηγοροῦντες) most likely alludes to the expectation of the return of Christ and thus provides some of the motivation for praying. We engage earnestly in prayer because of our expectancy that Jesus is coming again!

This expectancy is based in thanksgiving. This is a repeated theme of Paul in the letter: cf. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2. A huge motivation for and also content in praying is our gratitude to God for His blessings. When thanksgiving permeates our praying we will come before God in prayer more properly and our prayers will tend to be on target.<sup>14</sup>

The apostle attached great importance to intercessory prayer for his ministry by the communities of faith connected to him.<sup>15</sup> Helpful commentary on this request is provided by O’Brien:

The apostle’s exhortation to persevering prayer is immediately followed by a request for the intercession of the Colossians for himself and his coworkers. He offers petition regularly for them (1:3, 9) and now asks that as they pray for the coming of the kingdom they will at the same time (ἄμα denotes the coincidence of two actions in time, BDF para. 425[2], BAG, 42) consistently remember him before the throne of grace (προσευχόμενοι, “praying,” a present tense, suggests an ongoing intercessory activity). Clearly he attached great importance to this regular, reciprocal intercession by his converts and other Christians in the gentile mission since he appeals for this prayerful support elsewhere (Rom 15:30–32; Eph 6:19; Phil 1:19; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1, 2, and Phlm 22). He earnestly desired their understanding and help in his struggle for the gospel and there was no better way to express this than by intercessory prayer. The request is that they might pray “for us” (περὶ ἡμῶν, which corresponds to the περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, “praying for you,” of 1:8; cf v 9 and note the similar correspondence at 2 Thess 3:1 and 1:11; see Riesenfeld, TDNT 6, 54, and Wiles, Prayers, 259–84), a reference that no doubt includes his friends and colleagues mentioned later in the chapter who were messengers of the gospel (perhaps Timothy, [1:1] and Epaphras [4:12, 13] are especially in view; so Lightfoot, 229). But it is clear that Paul is thinking primarily of his own need for he slips into the first person singular later in the sentence (“for which I am in chains, that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should,” vv 3b, 4).<sup>16</sup>

The goal of such intercession for Paul and his associates is clear: “that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should” (ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι’ ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι. ). Paul did not ask the church to pray that his imprisonment would be lightened, nor that he would be released from prison. Instead, his concern was that the church would pray that God

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<sup>12</sup>Col. 1:3 (NRSV): “In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,…”

Col. 1:9-10 (NRSV): “9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.”

<sup>13</sup>“Praying in the Spirit” here (διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι) has absolutely nothing to do with glossolalia or some kind of weird manner of praying. Instead, the apostle stresses the importance of following the leadership of the Holy Spirit in both the kind of prayers offered and the content of those prayers. By this we will avoid improper praying that God cannot honor.

<sup>14</sup>Compare James 4:3 for improper praying based on selfishness: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.”

<sup>15</sup>“In addition he earnestly requests his readers to intercede for him in his costly work of spreading the gospel (Rom 15:30–32; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:19; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1, 2; Phlm 22).” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 261]

<sup>16</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 240-241.

would open new opportunities<sup>17</sup> for him to speak the gospel message while in Roman custody.<sup>18</sup> This is virtually the same request as found in Eph. 6:19-20: “Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.” Notice also that the ‘mystery of Christ’ in Colossians equals the ‘mystery of the gospel’ in Ephesians. Paul was concerned that he could make known the salvation in Christ that was unknown and hidden from his Roman captors. He felt strong compulsion from God to do this: Col. 4:4, “as I should” (ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι); Eph. 6:20, “as I must speak” (ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι).

**Building good relations, vv. 5-6:** “5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” (4.5 Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι. 4.6 ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἄλατι ἠρτυμένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἑκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.)

The second set of admonitions targets Christian relationships to the non-Christian world. The New Testament in general places importance on the reaction of the non-Christian world to believers.<sup>19</sup> The reputation of Christians in the non-Christian world is important. To be sure, the church can’t control how the rest of the world views us, but the New Testament is adamant that believers do nothing to legitimize negative attitudes toward Christianity.

The first core admonition is simply: “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders” (Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω). The idea of ‘walking toward’ underscores behavior in regard to.<sup>20</sup> The outsiders mentioned here are those outside the Christian community of believers.<sup>21</sup> The conduct of believers toward non-

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<sup>17</sup>“The image of an open door turns up in Hellenistic thought (Epictetus employs it in the sense of a person being free to go anywhere; “opened doors” is also a figure of literary activity, cf. Jeremias, TDNT 3, 174) as well as in later Judaism where man opens the door to God by repenting, while God opens the door to man by giving him opportunities for intercession or repentance, or by granting grace (Str-B 1, 458; 2, 728; 3, 484, 485, 631; Jeremias, TDNT 3, 174). Within the New Testament this picture of an open door, which is used in missionary contexts, denotes the provision of opportunity. God opens a door for the missionary by giving him a field in which to work (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) and he opens a door of faith to Gentiles so that they might believe (Acts 14:27; elsewhere ἀνοίγω is used of the opening of the eyes, Luke 24:31; Acts 26:18; of the understanding, Luke 24:45; of the heart, Acts 16:14; and of Scripture, Luke 24:32; Acts 17:3). In Colossians 4:3 God is to be petitioned to open a door for the gospel message (several commentators, both ancient and modern, on the basis of Eph 6:19, have taken this to mean “the door of our speech,” i.e. “our mouth,” cf. Beza, Bengel; note also Lohmeyer, 161, who understands it of access by Paul to the right thing to say. But this interpretation is less likely) — this of course also means a door for the messenger, but here the emphasis falls upon the dynamic, almost personal, character of the Word (cf 2 Thess 3:1, a prayer request, “Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may run and be honored”). Paul is concerned for an opportunity for effective evangelism; and it is just possible that he is asking them to pray for his release from prison (so many commentators; cf Philm 22, and on Paul’s imprisonment see xlix–liv). On the other hand, even when he was at liberty such doors did not open up to him automatically (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) and the apostle did not regard imprisonment as a serious interruption of his missionary work (Phil 1:12, 13; so Caird, 210). At the conclusion of the Book of Acts (28:30, 31) Luke indicates an open door was set before Paul in Rome. The opportunities were considerable though special wisdom was called for (cf Bruce, 298).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 240.]

<sup>18</sup>Note his similar requests in other letters:

Rom. 15:30-32 (NRSV): “30 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.”

2 Thess. 3:1-2 (NRSV): “1 Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, 2 and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith.”

<sup>19</sup>“Elsewhere in the exhortatory material of the NT the reaction of non-Christians to the behavior of believers plays a significant role: (a) the latter are to live in such a way that God’s name is not dishonored, and (b) no occasion of stumbling should be given which would prevent men and women being saved (see 1 Cor 10:32, 33; Phil 2:14, 15; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:11, 12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1; Tit 2:8; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:1, 16; cf van Unnik, *Judentum*, 221–34).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 242.]

<sup>20</sup>“The verb act is the same one used in 1:10, 2:6, 3:7, indicating way of life, behavior, conduct. Be wise in the way you act may be rendered as ‘behave wisely,’ or ‘use wisdom in the way in which you conduct yourself,’ or ‘be wise in the way in which you live.’” [Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Helps for translators; UBS handbook series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 100]

<sup>21</sup>“The expression ‘outsiders’ corresponds to the rabbinic *ha-hišônîm*, ‘those who are outside,’ that is, either heretics or ‘the people of the land’; cf. 2 Macc 1:16; Thucyd. 5, 14, 3, and note Str-B 3,362, Behm, TDNT 2, 575, 576, and BAG, 279) carries a semitechnical meaning and refers to non-Christians generally, especially pagans (1 Cor 5:12, 31; 1 Thess 4:12; cf. 1 Tim 3:7; 2 Clem 13:1). Elsewhere in the exhortatory material of the NT the reaction of non-Christians to the behavior of believers plays a significant role: (a) the latter are to live in such a way that God’s name is not dishonored, and (b) no occasion of stumbling should be given which would prevent men and women being saved (see 1 Cor 10:32, 33; Phil 2:14, 15; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:11, 12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1; Tit 2:8; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:1, 16; cf van Unnik, *Judentum*, 221–34).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 242.]

believers is to take place ‘in wisdom.’<sup>22</sup>

A major means of achieving this is by “making the most of the time” (τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι). Bratcher and Nida offer a helpful explanation:<sup>23</sup>

The participle that follows is literally “buying out, redeeming”; only here and in the parallel Eph 5:16 is it used in the sense of making good use of. Most commentators and translators give the same meaning as it appears in TEV and RSV. Some, however, have understood the text to mean “redeeming the time from the power of Evil,” but this seems most unlikely. The Colossians are enjoined to seize and use every opportunity of witnessing to their faith to the non-Christian society in which they live.

Believers are to utilize every opportunity to present a good witness to their non-Christian neighbors by both word and deed. Spiritual sensitivity is required to be able to do this correctly.

The second core admonition focuses on our speech: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” (ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.). In relating to our non-Christian friends and neighbors our speech plays a central role in developing positive relationships. The apostle indicates that our speech must always (πάντοτε) have two fundamental qualities: grace and salt.

*Our speech must be gracious:* ἐν χάριτι. Note James Dunn’s explanation:<sup>24</sup>

“Let your spoken word [BAGD s.v. λόγος 1] be always [πάντοτε, as in 1:3] with grace.” Here the last term certainly echoes the normal usage of χάρις in relation to speech, that is, “graciousness, attractiveness,” that which delights and charms (cf. Ps. 45:2; Eccl. 10:12; Sir. 21:16; Josephus, Antiquities 18.208; Luke 4:22; Lightfoot 230; BAGD s.v. χάρις 1), though no Paulinist would intend such a usage to be independent of the χάρις manifested in Christ and fundamental to the Pauline gospel (see on 1:2, 6 and 3:16).

Gracious stands in contrast to harsh and confrontational. The believer is not to be confrontational or ‘hard to get along with.’ This is true even when believers have to stand firm in their spiritual convictions. Deep convictions can be shared graciously, and don’t have to be expressed with harshness.

*Our speech must be salty:* ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος. The picture of ‘salty language’ in English conveys the opposite of what Paul has in mind with his use of the image of salt connected to speaking. James Dunn proposes an explanation that challenges most of us today:<sup>25</sup>

This slightly unexpected sense of agreeable speech is enhanced by the addition, ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος. The image is clear: salt that seasons, that is, makes more interesting what would otherwise be bland to the taste (Job 6:6; Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34; BAGD s.v. ἄρτύω). It was an obvious and familiar idiom: Timon (third century bc) calls the speech of the Academics ἀνάλιστος, “unsalted, insipid” (BAGD s.v. ἄλας 2); Plutarch speaks of a pastime or business “seasoned with the salt of conversation” and of wit as “the tastiest condiment of all,” called by some “graciousness” (χάριτας, Moralia 514E-F, 685A, cited by Lohse 168 n. 39); in Latin sales Attici means “Attic wit” (e.g., Cicero, Ad familiares 9.15.2, cited by Bruce, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians 175 n. 22; see also Wolter 212).<sup>1</sup> The conversation envisaged, then, should be agreeable and “never insipid” (NEB/REB), “with a flavour of wit” (JB/NJB). “Those who are the salt of the earth [cf. Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:49–50; Luke 14:34–35] may reasonably be expected to have some savour about their language” (Bruce, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians 175); cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* 10:2: “Be salted in him [Christ].”

The picture is as far as we can imagine from that of the Christian who has no interest in affairs outside those of faith or church and so no “small talk,” no ability to maintain an interesting conversation. In contrast, it envisages opportunities for lively interchanges with non-Christians on topics and in a style which could be expected to find a positive resonance with the conversation partners. It would not be conversation which has “gone bad,” but conversation which reflects the attractiveness of character displayed above all by Christ. Moreover, such

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12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1; Tit 2:8; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:1, 16; cf van Unnik, *Judentum*, 221–34).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 246.]

<sup>22</sup>“Wisdom’ (σοφία), as we have noted, turns up in several important contexts of Colossians (1:9, 28; 2:3 and 3:16; see on these verses). The wisdom which the apostle sets forth is fundamentally different from that propounded by the false teachers. The latter is but an empty show of wisdom (λόγος ... σοφίας, 2:23). Here ‘wisdom,’ which has to do with a knowledge of God’s will (1:9) and walking worthily of the Lord (1:10; cf. Wilckens, TDNT 7, 523), is essentially practical and realistic. Like the Philippians (2:15, ‘so that you may become blameless and pure ... shining like stars in the universe’) these readers are to be godly, giving no occasion for valid criticism (cf. 1 Cor 10:32, ‘Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God’). They should be tactful on the one hand, yet bold in their Christian witness to outsiders on the other (several commentators, including von Soden, 68, Moule, 133, and Ernst, 239, in the light of the immediate context, consider the apostle has missionary responsibilities in view; Merk, *Handeln*, 224, following van Unnik, *Judentum*, 228, recognizes there is no explicit basis mentioned but thinks the motivation is drawn from the missionary possibilities in the situation).” [O’Brien, *Ibid.*]

<sup>23</sup>[Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Helps for translators; UBS handbook series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 100]

<sup>24</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 267.

<sup>25</sup>Dunn, *Ibid.*, 266.



advice envisages a group of Christians in a sufficiently positive relation with the surrounding community for such conversations to be natural, a group not fearful or threatened, but open to and in positive relationship with its neighbors (even as “outsiders,” 4:5). Nor is there any hint of the persecution which is attested in other New Testament letters written to churches in Asia Minor (1 Pet. 4:12–19; Rev. 2:9–11, 13, etc.; the tone of 1 Pet. 3:15 is notably different in this respect), a fact which again suggests an earlier date. Rather, the picture evoked is one of social interaction and involvement in wider (Colossian) community affairs. Here, evidently, was a church not on the defensive against powerful forces organized against it, but expected to hold its own in the social setting of marketplace, baths, and meal table and to win attention by the attractiveness of its life and speech.

The objective of this kind of speech with non-Christians is “so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone” (εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι). Although somewhat similar to the admonition in 1 Peter 3:15b-16a,<sup>26</sup> the setting in 1 Peter is of Christians defending their faith against persecutors. But in Colossians a positive relationship with non-Christian neighbors is assumed, as Dunn points out above. Believers need to understand their Christian faith sufficiently to be able to explain it to non-Christians. This comes about only with careful study of scripture, discussion with other believers, and deep reflection on one’s faith commitment.

When Paul closes out his admonitions to believers in the Lycus valley, he lays on them -- and on us today -- a heavy responsibility for prayer and witness. God’s people need to be talking to the Lord earnestly and talking to non-Christians graciously and winsomely.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) How important is prayer to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) How important is prayer in your church? Does your congregation spend time praying in its worship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) How well do you get along with your non-Christian neighbors?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) Do your non-Christian friends find you an interesting person to talk with?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) How well can you explain your Christian faith to non-believers?

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<sup>26</sup>NRSV: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογία παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνειδήσιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν)