

Col 4:2-6, Final Greetings: Evangelistic Exhortation
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Overview

1. The whole book grows out of two summaries:
 - a) 1:3,4 introduces 1:5-20 chiastically (abc -> CBA)
 - 1) 3a, Give Thanks -> 12-10
 - 2) 3b, Praying -> 9-12 (12 transitional)
 - 3) 4, Heard -> 5-8
 - b) 1:21-23 introduces 1:24-4:17 via unfolding (abc -> CBABC)
 - 1) 21-22 Reconciled (position) -> 2:9-15
 - 2) 23a Continue (practice) -> 2:4-8; 2:16-4:1
 - 3) 23b Preached (Paul's ministry) -> 1:24-2:3; 4:2-17
 - c) 1:1,2 and 4:18 are epistolary overhead.

2. The balance of the book (except for the epistolary close) brings us back to Paul's ministry. It itself is chiastic, with two groups of ministry-related exhortations surrounding a roster of his associates.
 - a) 2-6, Exhortation to share in his outreach to the lost
 - b) 7-15, Greetings from those in Rome, to those in Colossae, and endorsement of the messengers
 - c) 16-17, Exhortation to share in his ministry to the saints

3. The opening set of three exhortations all concern the Colossians' responsibilities regarding the lost: their prayer ministry for evangelists (especially Paul); their own conduct before unbelievers; their speech. Note the order: first personal piety toward the Lord, then a godly life, which in turn persuades others to believe our speech.

A. 2-4, Their Prayer

Paul tells them HOW they are to pray, and then makes a specific request of WHAT they are to pray for.

1. 2, How should they pray?
 - a) Continue in it. Does this mean that we are always praying, and never doing anything else? The verb has two main contexts in the NT: to continue in prayer or other devotional activity (Acts 1:14; 2:42, 46; 6:4; Rom. 12:12); to wait on a person as his servant or disciple (Mark 3:9; Acts 8:13; 10:7). Perhaps the thing is the means for waiting on the person: We wait on the Lord by means of prayer. Example: Queen Juliana's butler waiting for her teacup, watching her every move so that he can respond to it. Paul exhorts them to recognize constantly that they are God's servants, and to maintain an open line with him at all times.

- b) Watch in prayer. The usual combination is "watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41; Mark 13:33; 14:38; Luke 21:36; cf. 1 Pet. 4:7). Neh 4:9 is a helpful parallel: the watch was against the enemies. Recognize that you are in a warfare; be on the alert, and seek God's help in prayer. Neither alone is enough.
 - 1) Watching in the strength of the flesh, without the Lord's help, is vain: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain," Ps 127:1.
 - 2) Prayer without taking reasonable precautions is presumptuous. Cf. the Lord on the pinnacle of the temple: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."
- c) With thanksgiving. Following Paul's example, always to give thanks. Cf. 3:15, 17; Phil. 4:6 "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," 1 Thes. 5:17-18, "Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Whatever needs we may face, we must not lose sight of the fact that they have been permitted by a sovereign, loving God, for his glory and our good.

2. 3,4, What should they pray for? Paul's ongoing ministry.

- a) One might expect Paul to pray for release from prison. Indeed, "opening a door of utterance" might take the form of opening the prison. But his focus is on advancing the Lord's work, not simply achieving his own freedom. It is for this work that he has been bound, and if he desires release, it is only in order that he might minister further.
- b) The items requested are a model of how we should pray for others in ministry: Opportunity and Attitude, external circumstance and internal strength.
 - 1) 3, Opportunity: An open door: Cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; an opportunity for ministry. A leading question by a coworker; a chance to offer comfort to someone who is bereaved. We should pray for open doors for one another, and ourselves be on the lookout when God provides them. NB: compared with Paul in prison, we all have a great open door in the freedom we enjoy.
 - 2) 4, Attitude: Boldness to take the opportunities. This is the point he emphasizes in the Ephesian parallel: "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly," 6:19. One hardly thinks of the great apostle as needing such a divine gift of boldness. If he required such intercession, how much more do we? If you are not as bold as you should be, perhaps it's because I'm not praying for you as much as I should be.
- c) On "we/I" shift, compare 1:28-29, which exhibits exactly the

same move. In seeking their prayers for himself, Paul does not want them to forget Timothy (1:1) and the others who are with him in Rome (4:10-14).

B. **5, Their Conduct**

Deals with the same two categories as their prayer: Opportunity and Attitude. While we pray for God to bless in both these areas, we must not idly stand by on the grounds that he hasn't yet given boldness or opportunity. We are to exercise due diligence "toward those without," that is, the unsaved.

1. Our Attitude: Walk in wisdom. Conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of Christ, exhibiting godliness. Don't be afraid to show Christ in your life. You may not be eloquent in speech, but there is never any excuse for not living as God's child.
2. Our Opportunity: Redeeming the time, buying it up. People may not be ready to listen to us, but they are constantly observing our lives. So grab every opportunity to offer whatever testimony you can.

C. **6, Their Speech.**

The tongue is the hardest member of the body to tame: James 3:8 "the tongue can no man tame," but God can, and here Paul gives instructions on how he purposes to discipline it. He gives a command, followed by the result. Start with the result.

1. "That you may know how you ought to answer every man." This is half of what the Lord had promised to teach them in Matt. 10:19 ("take no thought HOW or what you shall speak"). You can't plan ahead of time how to speak; under the pressure of the moment the best plans evaporate. Yet this clause presents knowledge of how to speak as the result of something, and that something must be a preparation that we can do.
2. The first clause is the preparation. If we "always" speak in a certain manner, then the habit will be ingrained and we can count on speaking in the same way when we are on the spot for the Lord. The required manner is described with two phrases:
 - a) "In grace," "graciously." Not rude or abusive, but thoughtful, kind.
 - b) "Seasoned with salt." A balancing characteristic. One way we could avoid offense would be to be insipid, void of meaning or conviction, like unsalted cauliflower or the white of an egg. This the Lord does not permit. Without violating common decency and courtesy, we must make our message plain and clear. Our manner must not be offensive; our message often will be, and it is our responsibility to make it so.
3. How about the second half of Matt. 10:19, "take no thought... WHAT you shall speak"? 1 Pet. 3:15 seems to answer that: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to

give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Building habits of gracious but incisive speech prepares us for HOW to speak; sanctifying the Lord in our hearts prepares us for WHAT we shall say. Isa. 8:13 shows that sanctifying the Lord means fearing him alone and making him the first object of our affection and obedience.

Analysis

A. 2-6, Personal Exhortations

1. 4:2 Th^h proseuxh^h proskarterei^{te},
 - a) grhgorou^{ntes} e)n au)th^h e)n eu)xaristi/a|,
 - b) 4:3 proseuxo/menoi a(/ma kai\ peri\ h(mwⁿ,
 - 1) i(/na o(qeo\s a)noi/ch| h(miⁿ qu/ran tou^h lo/gou,
 - a> lalh^{sai} to\ musth/rion tou^h Xristou^h,
 - 1> di' o(\ kai\ de/demai,
 - 2) 4:4 i(/na fanerw/sw au)to\ w(s dei^h me lalh^{sai}.
2. 4:5)En sofi/a| peripatei^{te} pro\s tou\s e)/cw,
 - a) to\n kairo\n e)cagorazo/menoi.
3. 4:6 o(lo/gos u(mwⁿ pa/ntote e)n xa/riti, a(/lati h)rtume/nos,
 - a) ei)de/nai pw^s dei^h u(ma^s e(ni\ e(ka/stw| a)pokri/nesqai.