

Supremacy of Christ: Colossians Ch 4
Nelson Cathedral
August 3, 2025

OT Kings 18:30-39

Colossians 4: 2-18

Mark 14: 32-38

Introduction

Have you ever stopped to think about how we end letters or emails in different ways depending on the context.

- If it is more formal, we might sign “yours Sincerely” or “Kind Regards”
- If it is more personal, we might say “Take Care” or even “Love”
- And before we sign off, especially in less formal contexts we might say something like, “please say Hi to the rest of the family” or “Lee-ann and the kids send their love”.

It is at the end of letters or emails that we get the more personal touches and today we come to the end of Paul’s letter to the Church in Colossae.

This letter was one of encouragement in the hope that those hearing it would not give up on the goodnews they had received in being part of God’s family, even in the face of pressure and opposition.

In writing to this church and expecting other churches to read it as well, Paul was highlighting:

- The Supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the very presence of God with us. Nothing else and no one else compares.
- That only Jesus offers us true and full Forgiveness.
- And that by His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has won total victory over all other powers and authorities, both physical and spiritual.

Paul paints a breathtaking vision of Jesus and our security as God's children. And because our life in Christ is complete, there is a new way of living that means faith and thankfulness is demonstrated to the world by word and action.

In chapter three, Paul focused on our personal response, an exhortation to the holiness of this new life, pursuing one direction and avoiding another, and a call to being heavenly minded (3:2).

This change flowed over into the family relationships of this early church community, where mutual love and respect was displayed, rather than dominance and control.

And now Paul closes by highlighting again three aspects of his letter: Prayer, Acting and Speaking wisely, and working together.

Prayer

Prayer forms the bookends of this letter where Paul began by giving thanks to God for these new believers and praying for them (1:3), and now he urges the Colossians to "devote themselves in prayer" (4:2). But what does devoting themselves to prayer mean?

The first two aspects of being devoted in prayer are Personal:

1. First to pray **earnestly**. Let me illustrate this with the opposite, where often it is more efficient to make something only when it is needed. In terms of prayer, to pray only when we are in need - "God I really need a carpark".

But prayer does not work that way, it is about a relationship and takes effort and practice. And if we believe and expect our prayers to have an effect in our lives and our world, then it cannot be sporadic or haphazard. We cannot fall back on

prayer only when we think we need it, but must devote ourselves to it.

In our Gospel reading where Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane with the disciples, we see a good example. Jesus' life and ministry was marked by prayer and especially in these final hours. But I know for myself, so often I feel like one of those disciples falling asleep. But Jesus calls us to be devoted in prayer as the very practice that empowers our faith. It is so easy to fall into the habit of only praying when in need, rather than praying when we breath.

2. The second aspect of personal prayer is to pray Urgently, where Paul wrote "keeping alert in prayer with thanksgiving". For the Colossians there was a sense that the time was near when Jesus would return to judge the world.

Therefore, for us the time is now to pray for others to know Christ, and the time is now to pray for our broken and hurting world.

And part of the urgency of prayer is to not forget to pray about everything, including audacious prayers - praying for things only God can do which I talked about in the bulletin a few weeks ago. In our Old Testament reading we see the greatest example of this in the story of Elijah as he battled the prophets of Baal for the hearts of the Israelites. And God showed up and did the unthinkable –“the fire of the Lord consumed the offering, including the water”. The Lord indeed is God.

Acting Wisely

From prayer, Paul now repeats his call for acting wisely in the world. The reality is that people often listen to the goodnews of Jesus with their eyes rather than with

their ears as they look at the lives of those who follow Jesus.

In Paul's day, Christianity was new and for some strange – it was a radical lifestyle, but for many in our culture Christianity is old-hat and now irrelevant. As one commentator stated, "In the secularized world of today, when being a Christian is no longer a matter of course, Christian conduct itself takes on a missionary function again".

In verse 6, Paul once again focuses on speech and the contrast between humility and arrogance.

In the Roman world it was arrogance that was a virtue and humility was a vice, a sign of weakness to be avoided. Sadly, this view is returning to our world. Through Jesus we have received God's grace in our lives, and through our lives we can offer others God's grace.

Teamwork

Finally, Paul comes to the very personal part of his letter from verse 7. In the Bible, lists of names are often things we skim over. But in the final verses of chapter 4 we get a real glimpse into the life of the early church as Paul acknowledges a number of people, both men and women, who were important to him.

What hear of real people who were supporting Paul, starting churches, sharing the good news and supporting each other. Some in this list even had personal failure in their faith such as Mark (Acts 13:13 and 15:36), Onesimus (Philemon) and Demas (2Tim 4:10). But here we see God's grace once more, with these three now being restored and included in the family and workforce of God.

And even more, Mark along with Luke who is also named, go on to write two of the Gospel accounts we have in the New Testament.

These names remind us that the journey of faith is a team sport, and we do not travel alone – we need each other. And that includes forgiveness when things go wrong.

And here we see the third aspect of prayer, that we can pray for each other, just as Paul now asks the Colossians to pray for him verse three. And I know over the past 2 weeks I have appreciated the prayers of the parish after surgery.

But our prayers also go further as we are reminded that our Church family is also regional and global, so we are united in prayer across the world to our Christian brothers and sisters.

Conclusion.

I want to finish with a quote from CS Lewis which in a way summarises Colossians chapter 4 and the people

that lie behind this letter, and also talks of the struggle of living out our faith in this world. Lewis writes:

No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes in the airing cupboard. The only fatal thing is to lose one's temper and give up. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us; it is the very sign of his presence.

The truth of the Gospel which Paul writes about is that we can never succeed on our own. The good news of the Gospel is that we do not have to. We live in Christ and triumph through him.

Amen.