

# **COLOSSIANS: THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST**

Part 8: “The Rhythms of a Christ-exalting Church”

Colossians 4:2-18

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Sunday, June 13, 2021 (Ordinary Time)

## **Scripture Reading**

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you” (Colossians 4:2–18, ESV).*

## **Introduction**

The letter to the Colossians is a celebration of the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus. Against all the powers and pressures that would press upon the church to twist, distort, or add to the gospel, Paul is unfolding the glory of the person and the work of Christ so we might know that Jesus is enough and he is better than anything this world could give us!

Christ in the invisible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). He has triumphed over spiritual powers and principalities that once held us in bondage to sin (2:15). He has

reconciled people of different nations (3:11), and made us all alive together in Christ (2:13). He gives us new life (3:4), and he restores our relationships (3:18-4:1).

Now, as Paul draws this beautiful letter to a close, he will give one final exhortation to the church. He will, in effect, say to the Colossians, “Now that you have beheld the glory of Christ, let that glory shine through the life of the church!”

In other words, don't simply be satisfied with knowing about who Jesus is. Experience Jesus. Participate in the reality of Jesus. Take responsibility individually and collectively to embody the truth of Jesus Christ to the world around you. Paul is saying, “Now that you know how worthy Christ is of exaltation, be a Christ-exalting church!”

There is a supernatural power within an ordinary church that exalts Jesus in all they do. So, with that lens in mind, I want to take a closer look at our passage today to explore *“The Rhythms of a Christ-exalting Church.”*

We're going to walk through three big ideas: *1.) The Way We Relate to God in Prayer, 2.) The Way We Relate to Those Outside the Church, and 3.) The Way We Relate to Those Within the Church.*

## **Exposition**

### **1.) The Way We Relate to God in Prayer**

Paul began this letter with a prayer for the Colossians, *“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you...”* (Col 1:9a).

And now, he ends this letter by entreating and inviting the Colossians to participate in the ministry of prayer: *“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving”* (Col 4:2).

Paul has packed so many practical thoughts on prayer in this one verse.

We are to pray *continuously and steadfastly*. Prayer is not a performance that we only do on stage in public worship. Nor is prayer an emergency parachute that is to be used only when things go wrong. Prayer is to be a daily part of the Christian life and a regular practice of the church.

Prayer is one of the most important ways that we practically acknowledge that God is sovereign over our lives. If we doubt the sovereignty of God, then we will never pray. But if we truly believe that we serve a God who is kind and wise and powerful, we will naturally feel called to pray to him on a regular basis.

Now, I know what many of you might be thinking. What if I am just not good at prayer? What if I feel awkward when I try to pray? I want you to know you have nothing to be ashamed about, and you are not alone. With that said, I do hope that you would take some practical steps to develop a prayer life.

Firstly, we learn the language of prayer in the same way that we learn the language we speak. That is, we mimic the words spoken to us. God has spoken to us through his Scriptures. That means, when in doubt, we can always pray the words of the Bible back to God.

The “Lord’s Prayer” – found in Matthew 6:9-13 – is a prayer that I would encourage you to commit to memory. Teach it to your children. The Psalms are filled with prayers that you can read and then pray. When I feel convicted of a sin I often pray the words of Psalm 51: *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy blot my transgressions.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:1, 10).*

Memorize some of these prayers like this so that you too can pray them. One of the reasons we corporately confess the words of Scripture in our worship services is that we hope to train your heart to pray in your daily life.

I have even grown to love some of the old Jewish prayers, as well as Puritan prayers from the *Valley of Vision* or the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. It is often when we practice with the words of others that suddenly we will find a language or a voice of our own.

But we are to also pray *watchfully*, meaning that we should be mentally aware and engaged when we pray. Prayer is not about going through the motions. Prayer is a way we truly relate with a living God!

So, when you pray, slow down. Be attentive to how the Holy Spirit may be ministering to you. Pray expectantly in the name of Christ our ascended king, who has promised to return. Let prayer be a practice that awakens your hope for eternity.

Likewise, we are to pray *“with thanksgiving.”* As you pray, be mindful of what is good in your life. Open your eyes to the evidences of God’s grace around you. If you are healthy, thank God for your health. If you have provision, thank God for the way he has provided for you. If you have people in your life who you know and love and they know and love you, thank God for them.

It is no coincidence that the most joyful people in life are the most thankful, and the most unhappy people are the most critical and prone to complain. Make a list of things to thank God for, even in the midst of adversity, and pray with thanksgiving.

But where Paul spends most of his time giving instruction is concerning our call to pray *missionally*. Look at verses 3 and 4: *“At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col 4:3–4).*

Paul is saying, “By all means, pray for your desires and your needs. But pray for the church and the advance of the kingdom of God, as well.”

Pray for those that preach the word. Pray for your pastor to make the gospel – the mystery of Christ’s saving work – clear. I know I truly covet your prayers, and so do the others who teach the word of God from this pulpit and the other ministries of this church.

Pray that the word of God would increase through newly planted churches like Redeemer Borger, Redeemer Odessa, and Redeemer San Angelo. Pray for J.R. and Megan Favela as they prepare to replant a church in East Amarillo next year.

Pray for global missionaries and church planters we support in places like El Salvador, India, Kuwait, and Kenya. Pray for unreached people groups.

I personally know that the most powerful times of ministry in my life have also been the most prayerful times in my life.

Our God is a supernatural God. He is infinitely powerful, and he is a good Heavenly Father who hears the prayers of his people. Let us be a people who pray to him.

## **2.) The Way We Relate to Those Outside the Church**

Many voices in modern media characterize the relationship between those inside the church and those outside of the church as a “*culture war*.” The idea is that the secularists have taken over culture and that it is the job of Christians to take it back by any means necessary.

We must not fall into this trap. The culture war is a very secular and fleshly way of envisioning our world and our place in society.

*Jesus has not called us to be culture warriors. He has called us to be kingdom ambassadors.*

As Paul says elsewhere, “*From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*” (2 Cor 5:16–20).

If you think about it, an ambassador understands that he or she lives in one kingdom, but is ultimately loyal to another. Sometimes an ambassador may even be called to live in what some would call enemy territory. But an ambassador is not a warrior bent on conquest. An ambassador is a representative of another kingdom. Christians who live as

ambassadors understand that our actions and words are constantly representing the kingdom of Jesus to those who do not yet believe.

This is why Paul instructs the Colossians, “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time*” (Col 4:5).

Christians, when we are relating with those who are not Christians, we are called to reflect the *wisdom* of Christ in our lives. We are to steward the limited moments we have with people, not to earn their approval or to pick a fight, but to point people to Jesus.

When you engage unbelievers, remember the goal. Our goal is not to have a cathartic release of anger, to put people in their place, to tell it how it is, or to humiliate or “own” those you disagree with. We are ministers of reconciliations. We are called to be strategic and persuasive that we might commend the way of Jesus.

We are to model our words and behavior after missionaries, not pundits. We are to be emissaries, not echo-chambers.

This means we must watch the way we speak. As Paul says, “*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*” (Col 4:6).

So, by all means, speak what is true, but speak the truth with *grace*.

To speak in a way that is “seasoned with salt” does not mean for us to be what we would call “salty.” It means that when we speak about Jesus, we should speak with clarity and passion and beauty and in a way that captures people’s imaginations and interest.

But the character of our speech is just as important as the content of our speech. We must let the fruit of the Holy Spirit be evidenced in our words. So, if you are on social media, you may want to do an audit of the words you have posted or reposted in the last few years. Do they reflect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22)? Or do they reflect bitterness, fear, and rage?

We must avoid the polarizing rhetoric and underhanded methods of those that would oppose the church or those with whom we most passionately disagree. We must display to a watching world the difference of the kingdom of God.

We are to love because Christ has loved us while we were his enemies. We are to radiate joy because Christ has freed us from sin. We embody peace because our eternal future is secure.

Our words matter. And our manner must not contradict our message.

### 3.) The Way We Relate to One Another Within the Church

How Christians relate to one another also matters. If the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus by our love for one another (cf. Jn 13:35), then to walk in pettiness, gossip, and division within the church is a disgrace to the name of Jesus.

It is all too easy for churches to slip into patterns where words of critique are more common than words of comfort; where insincerity, suspicion, and criticism is more normal than honesty, affection, and encouragement.

But in many of Paul's final greetings, we are able to get a glimpse of what the church can be and what the church is called to be. It's easy to get lost in a passage like this because it just seems like a random list of unfamiliar and foreign sounding names.

But to Paul, each of these names has deep meaning. After all, Paul knows that the church is not an abstract organization. It is a family of people who have combined their individual efforts to accomplish something so much bigger than themselves. It is a family of genuine love.

As Paul writes in verse 7, *"Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts"* (Col 4:7–8).

Paul mentions Tychicus, who will deliver, and likely, read and teach this letter to the Colossian church. Along with him is Onesimus, a runaway bondservant, who Paul has sent back to Colossae to be reconciled with his former master (Philemon) and ultimately set free (4:9; Phlm 1,10).

Paul then mentions several men who have traveled and ministered with him. Some of these are "men of the circumcision" (4:10-11), meaning that they, along with Paul, are ethnically Jewish. This means that, like Paul, their commitment to follow Jesus was personally costly. They likely endured rejection and hostility from their friends and family.

There was Epaphras, the original pastor who planted the church at Colossae, who was mentioned at the beginning of the letter (1:7; 4:12). We learn here he that he is a deeply considerate and prayerful man, who also went on to plant churches in the surrounding communities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13).

We also have Luke, who went on to author the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. We learn from this passage that Luke was once a doctor who then gave up his wealth and privilege to become a missionary (4:14).

Paul then encourages Nympha, who has generously opened her home in order to host the church of Laodicea (Col 4:15).

Then, Paul seems to directly address Archippus, who seems to be the current pastor of the church at Colossae (Phlm 2). We know from other parts of the letter that the church of Colossae is experiencing great pressure from the outside culture. What we often don't consider is how this challenging situation would have personally affected this church's pastor. I imagine it would have been easy for this pastor to want to give up, to throw in the towel, to find a vocation with less drama and pain. But to Pastor Archippus, the Apostle says, *"See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord"* (Col 4:17).

You see, if we look just a little closer, we will see the people who composed the church were people like you and me. In many ways, they were profoundly ordinary people. But through their simple faithfulness, something extraordinary was happening.

And so too, among us, there are ordinary people who are, nevertheless, advancing the kingdom of God in extraordinary ways.

I think of Milton and Barbie Jones and Dane and Pam Welch, who have a truly global impact from the city of Amarillo through organizations like Christian Relief Fund and Crisis Aid.

I think of Ryan and Crystal Pennington, who were once missionaries in foreign nations, but who now – through Refugee Language Project – are reaching and serving people from many nations in our own city.

I think of the many people who told me the first person to kindly greet them at Redeemer Christian Church was David May. I think of how many people have received a thoughtful check-in text from Derek or Lesley Criswell, asking how they can pray for them. I think of the servant-heart of people like Nichole Gutierrez and Bruce Hill. I think of the often-unseen attentiveness and care that people like Kevin Mitchell and Ann Willard give to our finances, week after week.

Not to mention all of our Gospel Community leaders and hosts; our musicians who freely give their time off to lead us in singing week after week; our tech team, our welcome team, safety team, prayer team, communion servers, and kids, youth, and college ministry volunteers; all the deacons, elders, and staff who compose and lead the various ministries of this church.

Through these people, the kingdom of God is advancing. Through you, the kingdom of God is advancing.

The ordinary people of God are doing extraordinary things all around us. Through normal people of God, the supernatural power of God is flowing.

Let us build a culture where we regularly celebrate and encourage such people!



## **Conclusion**

The church is the body of this Jesus Christ, who is both supreme and sufficient.

We are called to bear the image of his death through our self-sacrifice, service, and generosity. And we are called to bear the image of his resurrection by our joy, holiness, and bringing life to places of death.

We are not the hope of the world. But we are called to bear witness to the hope of the world.

We are to declare this gospel with our words and display it with our lives to our neighbors and the nations.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, as Colossians concludes, may the grace of God come to you. May the grace of God pass through you. And may the grace of God remain with you, now and forevermore (Col 4:18).

AMEN.

## **Ministry**

- Follower of Jesus
- Grow in prayer
- Help in bearing witness to Christ
- Maybe you haven't been bold enough; maybe you haven't walked in wisdom and grace
- Help in encouraging one another
- Repent for criticism or gossip; help be a blessing to others in the church

## **Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities**

1. Read Colossians 4:2-18. This is our final week of an eight-week sermon series on the book of Colossians. What are the big ideas you have taken away from this study? How has Colossians encouraged and challenged you in this season?
2. How should Col 4:2-4 help shape the way that we pray?
3. What is the importance of walking "in wisdom toward outsiders" (Col 4:5)? Why is it so important for Christians to speak in such a way that our speech is "gracious" (Col 4:6)? How should these verses help shape our witness to our neighbors who do not yet believe in Jesus?
4. In this section of Colossians, Paul gives some final greetings that include specific information about Paul's ministry team, as well as the church in Colossae and the surrounding region (Col 4:7-18). These words show that Paul is thankful for his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Through many of these words, he is



exhorting and encouraging fellow believers. Spend some time talking about people in your church and gospel community for whom you are thankful. Are there words of encouragement that you might speak over one another as you meet with your Gospel Community?

5. Take a final moment to pray that “a door” would be open for Redeemer to reach those who do not yet believe the gospel in the Amarillo area. Pray for those who are called to “declare the mystery of Christ” (Col 4:3).