

## ***International Bible Lessons Commentary***

### ***Colossians 4:2-18***

***International Bible Lessons***

**Sunday, February 24, 2013**

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The ***International Bible Lesson*** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 24, 2013**, is from **Colossians 4:2-17**. **Colossians 4:18** is also included in the commentary below, because it concludes Paul's letter and teaches how Paul signed some of his letters in order to authenticate them and bless his readers.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lessons Commentary* (also known as the *Bible Lesson Forum*). **Study Hints for Thinking Further** give possible hints to answer the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](http://InternationalBibleLessons.org) website and below. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive [International Bible Lessons Commentary Index](#). The weekly [International Bible Lesson](#) is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at <http://InternationalBibleLessons.org> and in [The Oklahoman](#) newspaper.

## ***International Bible Lesson Commentary***

### ***Colossians 4:2-18***

**(Colossians 4:2) Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.**

Paul requested that people pray for him, his ministry, and his effectiveness in preaching the good news about Jesus. Paul also said that people should commit themselves wholeheartedly to prayer and to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Since our battles are most often against cosmic powers in the heavenly places and not against human adversaries (see Ephesians 6:12), we need prayer to win these battles, overcome temptations, and understand the true meaning of the Word of God. We also need to thank the Lord of the universe for creating all things and meeting all needs. We need to thank the Lord Jesus for the gift of eternal life and for the privilege of bringing our needs to Him through prayer.

**(Colossians 4:3) 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,**

In his letter, Paul did not ask the Colossians to pray for his release from prison; he probably assumed they would pray for his release. When the apostles were imprisoned, “they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name [of Jesus Christ] (Acts 5:41). He requested that they pray for him to serve the Lord

Jesus Christ effectively everywhere he stayed or went—including while suffering in prison. He wanted them to pray for him to continue experiencing the privilege of teaching about Jesus, and that those who listened would open the doors of their hearts and minds to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The mystery of Christ includes the facts that Jesus Christ indwells the true believer as their Savior, and Jesus Christ brings Jews and Gentiles together in peace through their common faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord.

**(Colossians 4:4) so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.**

In his letters, Paul wrote about the gospel of Jesus Christ and the proper application of the gospel—even when he wrote from prison. When in prison, in the marketplace, in his home, and in the synagogues (until synagogue leaders excluded Paul and others because they were Christians), Paul talked about Christ. He wanted others to pray for him to clearly preach and teach so people could understand the mystery of Christ. If his listeners rejected Jesus Christ, he did not want the reason to be that he had not revealed the mystery clearly or had not clearly answered their questions—Paul knew that his success in teaching about Christ depended on prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul tried to reveal the mystery of Jesus Christ to everyone, rather than try to keep it hidden from some or create a society that shared “mysteries” only among themselves.

**(Colossians 4:5) Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.**

As Paul began to conclude his letter, he did not want believers to think that a life of prayer was the only thing God required, or that all believers needed to do as followers of Jesus Christ was study and pray. Just as Paul wanted their prayers to help him speak clearly to others, he wanted them to speak and act wisely toward others too—not only inside the church, but also outside the church. With our limited time on Earth, we need to pray and make the most of our time to teach about Jesus Christ from the Scriptures.

**(Colossians 4:6) Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.**

Earlier in his letter, Paul wrote that we should not use abusive language (see Colossians 3:8). Rather than speak in anger, we need to speak gracious words—kind and loving words, words that will make a person’s life better (as salt makes food taste better, keeps some foods from rotting, and is necessary for life to exist). “Seasoned with salt” means “just the right amount,” for too little salt does not satisfy and too much salt can ruin the flavor of something or be physically harmful. In answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit will help believers speak and teach “just the right amount” of truth. As we pray, we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will help us answer everyone clearly, wisely, and rightfully according to the Scriptures. The Bible does not teach “just believe, don’t ask any questions;” rather, the Bible teaches believers to pray and prepare so they will know how “to answer everyone,” and then pray as they give their answers to people.

**(Colossians 4:7) Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord.**

Paul now adds a series of personal comments to conclude his letter. Tychicus was a longtime companion of Paul, who probably delivered and helped Paul write letters to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and possibly others. We read about Tychicus in Acts 20:4; 2 Timothy 4:12; and Titus 3:12. Paul described Tychicus as “beloved,” “faithful,” and a “fellow servant of the Lord,” which would be a high commendation for any true believer. Paul expected Tychicus to give a personal report about Paul and his ministry when he delivered Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

**(Colossians 4:8) 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;**

Paul wrote what he thought was most important spiritually and morally. As the letter carrier, Tychicus could further explain Paul’s meaning as well as minister to them personally. He could tell them more about Paul’s situation than Paul could write (Paul probably wanted to share more pressing truths than just write about his personal problems). Tychicus would speak as Paul directed and give them encouragement. When he “encouraged their hearts,” he would strengthen them spiritually to conduct themselves in the ways Paul instructed them to act.

**(Colossians 4:9) he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.**

By sending Tychicus and Onesimus, Paul sent two witnesses regarding his situation, intentions, and teachings (at least two witnesses to testify about something being true was a common practice [and a requirement for a conviction of a crime] in both the Old and New Testaments). When we read Paul’s Letter to Philemon, we learn why Onesimus travelled with Tychicus to visit the Colossians. Philemon would hear Paul’s letter read to the church as well as receive a personal letter from Paul. Everyone in the church would probably want to know what Paul wrote to Philemon (if Tychicus and Onesimus told them about the personal letter, which seems likely since we have that letter in the Bible). Tychicus could explain to Philemon all that Paul meant in his letter and answer any questions that Philemon might have regarding Paul and the conversion of Onesimus to the Christian faith and his obedience to Christ. The whole church would learn that Paul considered Onesimus a “faithful and beloved brother.” The fact that Paul’s Letter to Philemon and Paul’s Letter to the Colossians are preserved in the Bible is good evidence that Philemon forgave Onesimus and welcomed him as a brother in Christ (as Paul intended).

**(Colossians 4:10) Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him.**

Along with Tychicus and Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus were with Paul in Rome (these three were Christians with a Jewish background). Luke wrote about

Aristarchus in Acts 19:29; 20:4; and 27:2. By this time, Mark, Paul, and Barnabas had reconciled their differences (they had separated 12 years earlier in a dispute over mission work). Mark had probably matured as a Christian missionary and rejoined Paul.

**(Colossians 4:11) And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.**

We know nothing about Jesus Justus except what we learn in this verse. He was a co-worker “for the kingdom of God.” Paul described the Kingdom of God in Romans 14:17—“the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Paul found comfort from the fact that he had co-workers who would carry on the work of Christ no matter what happened to him. They helped him in practical ways while he was in prison.

**(Colossians 4:12) Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills.**

Epaphras and Luke were Gentiles, and Epaphras was a Colossian evangelist. Earlier, Paul told them to devote themselves to prayer. Epaphras “wrestled” in his prayers (reminding us of Jacob, who wrestled with God—Genesis 32:24). In other words, he prayed strenuously, even to exhaustion for them, so they would receive blessings from God. Epaphras wanted them to “stand mature,” rather than fall away from faith in Christ according to the Scriptures. God would enable them to do so in answer to prayer. He wanted them to do obey God and rest assured of God’s blessing their obedience.

**(Colossians 4:13) For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.**

Paul gave the equivalent of a legal testimony (or an official church missionary report) when he reported on the work of the Colossians’ missionary, Epaphras, whom they probably supported with their prayers and gifts. Epaphras worked hard for the Colossians—doing for them at a distance what they could not do themselves. The churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis also supported Epaphras in his missionary labors. Later, Jesus would call the church in Laodicea to repent (Revelation 3:14-22). Paul also sent a letter to Laodicea (now lost) where Epaphras had also worked.

**(Colossians 4:14) Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.**

Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, where we learn more about him as he accompanied Paul to Rome (from where he might have written the Book of Acts or at least the final chapters of the Book of Acts). From Paul’s reference here, we learn that Luke was a doctor. Demas eventually left Paul and perhaps also the Christian faith and practice, “having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10).

**(Colossians 4:15) Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.**

Laodicea was about 10 miles from Colossae. Nympha was probably the name of a woman (as this verse translates her name in English and refers to “her house”). Churches met in houses at that time, especially among the Gentiles and the Jews who could no longer meet in the synagogue. There might have been several house churches in a city, and house churches in nearby cities supported each other and missionaries.

**(Colossians 4:16) And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.**

Paul intended for his letter to the Colossians to be read in other churches because it contained universal truths or teachings that should apply to all churches. It may have been copied and read to many other churches —taken by approved messengers, such as Epaphras. Approved, known, and trusted messengers would be important to prove that a copied letter was authentic and from Paul himself without changes. Important letters were copied, shared, and preserved; some became inspired scriptures in the Bible.

**(Colossians 4:17) And say to Archippus, “See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.”**

Paul also mentioned Archippus in his letter to Philemon. We do not know his task, but many followers of Jesus Christ know that the tasks they are attempting to fulfill they have received from the Lord, and they are doing them “in the Lord;” that is, with the Lord’s help, power, and blessing upon them and those they serve. It would also be important for Paul to send, as often as he could, two witnesses wherever a letter from him was to be read (to authenticate the letter); the two witnesses could also report to him how his letter was received and what questions those in the church still had about the Christian faith and practice.

**(Colossians 4:18) I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. *Not in the lesson, but added to the commentary.***

This last verse is Paul’s way of authenticating his letter. Paul tried to make certain that no one could misrepresent his ideas, letters, or teachings and mislead others. He probably dictated this letter and approved its contents after his “secretary” read it back to him for approval. Then, he signed the letter in his own distinctive way or handwriting that his recipients would recognize. He prayed for the unmerited favor and power of God to accompany them in all they did, especially as they served the Lord. “Remember my chains” may have been Paul’s way of asking for prayers for his protection in prison and release from prison. He also wants the blessing and power of God to be upon them.

### **Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Other than a religious activity, what is an activity that many people devote themselves to each week? How much energy and time do you estimate they devote to that activity?
2. Do you suppose most people devote more or less time to that activity than they do to a religious or spiritual activity? How might their lives and the lives of others be different if they devoted that much energy and time to prayer?
3. What are some actions that we might take in order to clearly declare and reveal the mystery of Jesus Christ?
4. What does Paul teach about asking and answering questions?
5. Why is it important that after Paul wrote his letters he sent them to their destinations using trusted Christian messengers?

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