

“The Ministry of the Word”
Colossians 4:3-4
(Preached at Trinity, January 13, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. After spending several verses outlining the transforming effect of the Gospel upon domestic relations Paul begins to draw his letter to a close. First, he stresses the importance of prayer. As Christians the Colossians would have known prayer. Prayer and the Word of God are the lifeblood of the Christian life. They are at the heart of our relationship with God. God speaks to us through His Word and we speak to Him through prayer.
2. Knowing the Colossians prayed, Paul exhorts them to press on. In **Verse 2** he gives three exhortations:
 - Devote yourselves to prayer. The word literally means “to attend constantly.” He exhorts them to persevere in prayer. To pray without ceasing.
 - Then he adds: “Keeping alert in it” – the word means to stay awake.
 - Finally, Paul exhorts them to maintain an attitude of thanksgiving in their prayer life. In all of our discourse with God we must maintain a heart of praise and thanksgiving.
3. After Paul's exhortation to prayer he then makes a particular prayer request in **Verses 2-3** "praying at the same time for us as well"
 - A. Paul recognized the importance of prayer in his own life and ministry. He felt the weightiness of caring for God's people and the weightiness of rightly handling the Word of truth.
 - B. Paul continually encouraged others to pray for him
 - Romans 15:30 NAU** - "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,"
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU** - "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."
 - Ephesians 6:19-20 NAU** - "and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."
4. Paul's greatest passion was the ministry of the Word. But he knew that there were many obstacles in the work of the Gospel. Paul knew he needed God's grace to pave the way for the preaching of His Word and he needed God's grace to properly speak the mystery of the Word of God.

5. Paul's request is two-fold
 - I. That God would open up a door for the Word
 - II. That Paul and his companions might speak and make clear the mystery of Christ
6. This morning I want us to consider these two elements of Paul's request for prayer.
 - I. Paul is asking for prayer that God would open up a door for the Word
 - A. There are many things that hinder the progress of the Gospel
 1. Of course, this is from our perspective.
From God's perspective the Gospel goes forth as an unstoppable force.
 2. God has determined the salvation of His people
2 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU - "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."
 3. The same power that spoke the world into existence is awakening sinners and transforming lives.
2 Corinthians 4:6 NAU - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."
 4. But there are many forces on the earth that oppose the progress of the Gospel.
 - B. Paul often expressed how the Gospel was being opposed and hindered by Satan
 1. Satan works against the sinner. He takes advantage of our natural blindness
2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
Matthew 13:18-19 NAU - "Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil *one* comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road."
 2. Satan works against the messenger of the Gospel by filling our lives with endless distractions.
 - a. This is true of every area of our Christian life
 - b. He'll distract us with the many cares and enticements of this world. Satan deceives us into believing we are just too busy for evangelism.
 - c. We have our jobs and family duties. We have homes to maintain. And of course, countless activities and worldly pleasures.
 - d. This is why we have to be reminded:
Colossians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

3. He convinces us that others are more equipped for the work of evangelism than we are.
 - a. He'll convince you that you are poorly equipped – others seem more gifted
 - b. He'll whisper that this is pastoral work—they are the professionals
 4. Satan also hinders the Gospel by shutting down the doors of opportunity Paul recognized Satan's hand in hindering his progress

1 Thessalonians 2:18 NAU - "For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us."

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU - "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."
- C. Paul's desire was for God's superimposing grace in providing greater opportunities for him to share the Gospel
1. Paul was writing this letter from prison. He was praying for an open door. It could be a metaphor for freedom. But Paul wasn't praying that God would bring about his release from prison any more than he was praying for personal provision and physical needs.
 - a. Notice Paul says, "praying at the same time for us as well," Paul also has in mind Timothy and others
 - b. Paul was praying for immediate doors of opportunity; opportunities even while under arrest.

Philippians 1:12-14 NAU - "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³ so that my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴ and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."
 2. Satan might have thought he was hindering the Gospel but Paul was having greater opportunities than anyone could have imagined. This was by God's providence.
 3. There are governments today who will not allow missionaries in their countries. Islamic countries do not permit proselytizing. But God is still opening doors of opportunity
 4. We have discovered in the last two years the increasing "No Solicitation" signs in our neighborhoods, in essence shutting the door of opportunity for us to enter their property to share the Gospel. We need to pray that God will continue to open new doors of opportunity. The real question is whether we are willing to go through the doors.
- D. There is also the hindrance of the corruption of the human heart
1. Humanity resists the Gospel
 2. We pray that God might give the Word free course, lowering walls of resistance. Why were the Bereans more willing to receive God's Word than the Thessalonians?

- E. We need to pray diligently that the Word of God might go forth unhindered.
1. John Woodhouse writes: “The doors to this word are tightly shut and bolted! The darkness is thick. The alienation is extreme. The hostility is intense. This word will only do its work if *God* opens a door. So pray that he will.”¹
 2. Paul is asking for prayer not only for opportunity to preach but that he might do it well and that he might do it in the right way - “that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.”
- II. Paul is asking for prayer that he and his companions might speak and make clear the mystery of Christ
- Paul is actually wanting prayer for two things here.
- That he might preach the message with clarity - “that I may make it clear”
 - That he might do it in the right manner - “in the way I ought to speak.”
- A. Preaching demands hours of study so that the Word of God might be made clear
1. Literally, the word means “to make visible.”
 - a. We saw the word used in the previous chapter.
Colossians 3:4 NAU - “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”
 - b. We want to make the unknown known, the unclear clear. We should take the unfathomable Word and make it plain.
 2. The preacher is a student of the Word. He has to know how to handle the text and how to apply it to the lives of God’s people. He has to make clear that which is unclear.
There are many hindrances to the Gospel, but we don’t want one of them to be us.
 3. The preacher must handle the text carefully
2 Timothy 2:15 NAU - “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”
 4. The sermon isn’t ready to preach until the preacher has engaged the text. He can’t make it clear to others until it has become clear to him. He can’t feed others unless he has been fed.
- B. Paul is also asking that he preach the Word in a right manner
“in the way I ought to speak.”
1. William Hendriksen – “When a *good* message is proclaimed in a *bad* way it can do more harm than good.”²

¹ John Woodhouse, *Colossians and Philemon: So Walk in Him*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2011), 246–247.

² William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 6:181.

2. What is the right manner by which the Word of God must be spoken.
- a. It must be preached boldly – we must not fear the face of men.
Ephesians 6:20 NAU - "that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."
 The words of Luther ring loud and true for every generation.
 “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.”
*The body they may kill;
 God’s truth abideth still
 His kingdom is forever.*
 - b. It must be preached confidently – it is the Word of God.
Augustine: “It is the pastor who teaches. But it is Christ who commands through me. The preacher explains the text; if he says what is true, it is Christ speaking”
 - c. It must be preached truthfully – We must never use verses out of context or try to make them say what we want them to say or what others want us to say.
2 Timothy 4:2-4 NAU - "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."
 - d. It must be preached steadfastly – Paul says, “in season *and* out of season.” Paul told Timothy to stay at it:
1 Timothy 4:13 NAU - "Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."
 - e. It must be preached graciously – with patience and love.
Ephesians 4:15 NAU - " but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,"
1 Timothy 4:11-12 NAU - "Prescribe and teach these things. ¹² Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."
 - f. It must be preached wisely – the audience must always be considered. Are they believers, unbelievers, receptive, hostile. Paul had Jewish visitors and Gentile visitors. He had Roman soldiers and others of various backgrounds.

- g. Preaching in a right manner demands maintaining Christ as the focus
Colossians 4:3 NAU - "so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ"
1 Corinthians 2:2 NAU - "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."
Colossians 1:28 NAU - "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."
- C. Even after the text has been carefully interpreted and rightly delivered the preacher is dependent upon the Holy Spirit to press it upon the hearts of people.
1. This power has often been referred to as "unction." The unction of preaching must come from God. We must plead with Him for it.
Ephesians 6:19 NAU - "and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth"
 2. Churches must pray for the preaching of their church – for the preacher, for themselves, for others.
 E.M. Bounds: "Salvation never finds its way to a prayerless heart. The Holy Spirit never abides in a prayerless spirit. Preaching never edifies a prayerless soul. Christ knows nothing of prayerless Christians. The gospel cannot be projected by a prayerless preacher."
 3. Everything we do as Christians depends on prayer.
 Paul is urging these Christians to pray, pray, pray.
 Devote yourselves to prayer. Stay alert in prayer. Pray for the success of the Gospel.

Conclusion:

1. May this be a reminder to us of the importance of prayer in the ministry of our church.
2. Many times congregations fail to recognize how important prayer is for the success of the pulpit ministry. Would we see more power if we were more faithful in prayer?
 Our prayers are powerful in the ongoing progress of the Gospel.