

COLOSSIANS

CHAPTER FOUR

1. What is the duty of masters?

“Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (Colossians 4:1).

Although bondage and servitude were not directly prohibited by the Lord, He, through His apostle, set forth rules whereby the godly would conduct themselves in this situation.

It is immoral to capture people for this purpose. *“The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy... for kidnappers” (1st Timothy 1:9-10 NKJV).* What this and one other translation (NAS) call *“kidnappers”*, others refer to as *“menstealers”* (KJV, ASV) or *“enslavers”* (ESV) or *“slave traders”* (NIV).

It is immoral to withhold wages from laborers. *“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:1-4).* God pronounced woe on those who expected work to be unpaid (Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5). In fact, the Law of Moses required such prompt payment that laborers received their hire at the end of each workday (Leviticus 19:13); to do otherwise was considered oppression (Deuteronomy 24:14-

15). Jesus' story of the eleventh-hour laborers indicated same-day payment was very much the norm of His time (Matthew 20:8).

By the time justice and fairness are factored into the role of the master, what might have been called slavery would not appear as such to our eyes. Even after slavery has been abolished, what is just and fair ought to be practiced by employers in all situations.

Remember that, in Christ, those who otherwise would not be getting along together are able to dwell in peace (Isaiah 11:1-10).

2. How should our praying be characterized?

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2). Prayer should be continuous (Romans 12:12; Acts 2:42), watchful (Mark 14:38) – as all that we do should be (1st Corinthians 16:13; 1st Peter 5:8), and thankful (Philippians 4:6).

3. What did Paul request for himself and his companions?

“Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:3-4).

While commanding the Colossians to pray, he specifically asked for prayer for his company. In particular, he wanted opportunities for the gospel to be proclaimed; opportunities for preaching are frequently likened unto doors in Scripture (Acts 14:27; 1st Corinthians 16:9; 2nd Corinthians 2:12; Matthew 16:19).

He had this goal set despite his incarceration, which had never hindered him in the past (Acts 28:30-31).

Prayers should never be selfish (James 4:3), and neither should prayer requests.

4. How should our behavior in the presence of unbelievers be characterized?

“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5).

The impression we leave on unbelievers matters tremendously, causing them to recognize their opposition is unfounded (1st Peter 2:11-12, 15-16; Titus 2:8) and leading them to glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

In every regard, time is a precious and finite commodity (James 4:13-17; Proverbs 16:9; Psalm 90:12); it must be used in a way that leads others to Christ!

5. How should our speech be characterized?

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6).

As the *“salt of the earth”* (Matthew 5:13), everything we do must be well seasoned. Jesus was in the habit of speaking *“gracious words”* (Luke 4:22), so we ought to be, as well. We need to speak *“truth in love”* (Ephesians 4:15), without any *“corrupt word”* escaping (29), always aware that what comes from the mouth came from the heart first (Matthew 12:34-35).

Note, especially, that the speech referred to includes knowing how to *“answer”* because we should expect our faith to be questioned (1st Peter 3:15).

6. Who were Tychicus and Onesimus and what was their task?

“Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here” (Colossians 4:7-9).

Each one is described as *“faithful”* as well as *“a beloved brother”* – fine commendations from the apostle.

Tychicus was from Asia (Acts 20:4) and had at least met the elders of Ephesus previously (17). Paul told Timothy, who had previously worked in Ephesus (1st Timothy 1:3), that he was sending Tychicus to Ephesus (2nd Timothy 4:12). The Ephesians were told he was there to inform them about Paul’s situation (Ephesians 6:21-22), the same reason he was in Colosse.

Onesimus, is described to the Colossians as *“one of you”*, whereby Paul introduced them to a new member of the congregation that most of them were previously unacquainted with. Paul had converted him during his house arrest in Rome (Philemon 10-19); Onesimus was a runaway slave whose master was Philemon, a member of the church in Colosse.

7. Who were Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus, collectively and individually?

“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is

called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me” (Colossians 4:10-11).

Collectively, these three men were Paul’s *“only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision”*, meaning the only companions he had in his gospel work who were also Jewish. All the others – Tychicus and Onesimus who were previously mentioned, and Epaphras, Luke, and Demas whom he mentions next – must all be gentiles. Moreover, these Jewish Christians in his entourage had *“proved to be a comfort”*, which would be quite needful as he was then incarcerated (Colossians 4:18).

Aristarchus was an established *“traveling companion”* of Paul’s who was from Thessalonica in Macedonia (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Philemon 24). In the present text, Aristarchus is Paul’s *“fellow prisoner”* (Colossians 4:10), which probably does not mean that he was incarcerated like the apostle, as there is zero indication anyone else had been arrested or was awaiting a hearing from Caesar, but that he chose to stay with Paul during his imprisonment.

Mark, here identified as a *“cousin”* or nephew (KJV) to Barnabas was the son of a sister in Jerusalem named Mary in whose home disciples met (Acts 12:12, 25). Mark was his surname, and his first name was John. He was present as *“assistant”* to Paul and Barnabas during their first major preaching tour (Acts 13:5), but, for reasons unstated, John Mark *“departed from them”* at their second port-of-call (Acts 13:13). His departure and the decision whether to include him on a subsequent journey broke up Paul and Barnabas’s partnership (Acts 15:36-40). Even so, Paul later regarded him as *“useful to me”* (2nd Timothy 4:11).

Nothing is known about Jesus Justus beyond this verse. His existence goes to show that while Jesus of Nazareth is the only Christ (Acts 4:10, 12) and only Lord

(Ephesians 4:4-6), the name Jesus is not so exclusive. Most of us have known a Jésus or two and that is not blasphemous.

8. Who else saluted the Colossian brethren?

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you” (Colossians 4:12-14).

Epaphras has already been introduced as the brother who planted this church (Colossians 1:7). He was with Paul in prison at the time of this writing (Philemon 23).

Luke is only here identified by his occupation as a physician. He was one of Paul’s coworkers in the gospel (Philemon 24), and at one point was his only companion (2nd Timothy 4:11).

Although Demas was present with Paul when he wrote this epistle and Philemon (Philemon 24), by the time he wrote Second Timothy, which could have not have been much later, Demas had forsaken him for love of the world (2nd Timothy 4:10).

9. Whom were the Colossians told to greet on Paul’s behalf?

“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house” (Colossians 4:15).

The church of the Laodiceans is only mentioned in this epistle (Colossians 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16) and in the Revelation (Revelation 1:11; 3:14-22), by which time they had become lukewarm.

Nymphas is unknown beyond this verse. The person is male according to the masculine pronoun in some versions (KJV, NKJV), but female according to the feminine pronoun in others (NASB, ESV, NIV), which also present the name as “*Nympha*” rather than “*Nymphas*”, but that is not supported by the Greek. One version leaves this person neutral with use of “*their*” (ASV). These variations are not based on translation, but upon the manuscripts from which they are translated. Given that the name is a compound of two words meaning “bride” or “daughter-in-law” and “gift”, it is probably preferable to perceive this person as a woman. Ultimately, his or her sex is immaterial to our present grasp of the material written.

Evidently, the church in Laodicea met in this person’s house. This was a common practice (Romans 16:5; 1st Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 2), but some gathering places were decidedly not houses (1st Corinthians 11:22, 34). The church in Jerusalem began by assembling at the temple (Acts 2:46). One church met in a school (Acts 19:9). Another met in an unspecified “*upper room*” (Acts 20:8), although that was probably at someone’s home. What matters is that a church comes together “*in one place*” (1st Corinthians 11:20; 14:23), not what that place is.

10. What interaction did Paul want the Colossians and Laodiceans to undertake?

“Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16).

The apostle was instructing an exchange of written materials. This falls within the realm of legitimate church co-operation. While certain modern practices of church co-operation are unauthorized, this is definitively appropriate.

By this, we recognize that, upon being written, the New Testament entered into immediate circulation (cf. 2nd Peter 3:15-16). There would not have been a lengthy period of passing these materials down orally.

Public reading of Scripture, as a stand-alone function (1st Timothy 4:13), is appropriate in church (1st Thessalonians 5:27).

While it might confuse some, *“the epistle from Laodicea”* can be easily identified. Paul, writing from prison in Rome, was not discerning that one church in Asia was writing to another. *“The epistle from Laodicea”* was one he had written. It is not an epistle **to** Laodicea, some lost letter of his, but **from** there. This can best be explained as a letter that was in circulation, which the Laodiceans would get, even if it had not been addressed to them, and which they, in turn, would pass on to Colosse. No other epistle than Paul’s to the Ephesians make sense here. Consider all the parallels between these letters:

	Colossians	Ephesians
1	<i>“Redemption through His blood”</i> (1:14)	<i>“Redemption through His blood”</i> (1:7)
2	Prayers <i>“do not cease”</i> (1:9)	Prayers <i>“do not cease”</i> (1:16-17)
3	<i>“Inheritance of the saints”</i> (1:12)	<i>“Inheritance of the saints”</i> (1:18)
4	<i>“All things”</i> in Christ (1:16)	<i>“All things”</i> in Christ (1:10)
5	Principalities (1:16)	Principalities (1:21)
6	His mighty power (1:29)	His mighty power (1:19)
7	Head of the body/church (1:18-19)	Head of the body/church (1:22-23)
8	<i>“Mystery”</i> revealed (1:25-26)	<i>“Mystery”</i> revealed (3:2-3)
9	Made known (1:26-27)	Made known (3:4-5)
10	Perfect man (1:28)	Perfect man (4:13)
11	Dead in sin made alive (2:13)	Dead in sin made alive (2:1)

12	Abolished Law in His flesh (2:14)	Abolished Law in His flesh (2:14-15)
13	Growth of the body (2:19)	Growth of the body (2:21-22)
14	Put off/on (3:8-10)	Put off/on (4:21-24)
15	<i>"Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"</i> (3:16)	<i>"Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"</i> (5:19)
16	Thank God in Jesus' name (3:17)	Thank God in Jesus' name (5:20)
17	<i>"Wives, submit to your own husbands"</i> (3:18)	<i>"Wives, submit to your own husbands"</i> (5:22)
18	<i>"Husbands, love your wives"</i> (3:19)	<i>"Husbands, love your wives"</i> (5:25)
19	<i>"Children, obey"</i> (3:20)	<i>"Children, obey"</i> (6:1)
20	<i>"Fathers, do not provoke"</i> (3:21)	<i>"Fathers, do not provoke"</i> (6:4)
21	Bondservants, obey (3:22)	Bondservants, obey (6:5)
22	Reward from the Lord (3:24)	Reward from the Lord (6:8)
23	<i>"There is no partiality"</i> (3:25)	<i>"There is no partiality"</i> (6:9)
24	Masters, be fair (4:1)	Masters, be fair (6:9)
25	Prayer requested for Paul's preaching (4:3)	Prayer requested for Paul's preaching (6:19)
26	<i>"Redeeming the time"</i> (4:5)	<i>"Redeeming the time"</i> (5:16)

11. What charge was given to Archippus?

"And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it'" (Colossians 4:17).

Archippus was Paul's *"fellow soldier"* (Philemon 2), and, apparently, a member of Philemon's household and a member of the church meeting in that home. Taking heed to his ministry probably meant the same thing as Timothy being told to fulfill his ministry, which was to *"do the work of an evangelist"* (2nd Timothy 4:5).

12. How does the epistle conclude?

"This salutation by my own hand — Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen" (Colossians 4:18).

Although Paul might employ a brother to be his scribe (Romans 16:22), he always signed every letter, personally (2nd Thessalonians 3:27; cf. 1st Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Philemon 19), which helps us determine that those letters which are not attributed to any particular writer, such as Hebrews, could not have been his work.

Paul did not want his circumstances as a prisoner to be forgotten. Christians must remember our brethren who are being persecuted (Hebrews 13:3).