

THERE'S HOPE! Colossians ch. 4

You're in a serious jam. The year is 60-ish A.D. Your name is Epaphras. Normally unflappable, you seem to be unraveling. Having exhausted all your workarounds, you sorely need been-there-done-that wisdom that you can trust. Who's your go-to guy?

While in the Turkish city of Ephesus you sat under an amazing teacher named Paul. Known first as Saul, he'd brutalized Jesus Christ's first followers, thinking that pleased God. Then, transformed by Christ, you're back in Colossae, leading a group of new Jesus worshippers.

Heretics begin sabotaging the truth you'd learned from Paul. Gnostics claim exclusive knowledge that delegitimizes Jesus' teachings and authority. Some Jews become Christians but insist that to be *born again*, you must also lead a kosher life. With your flock under attack, you need that go-to, wisdom guy right now!

So you slog 1,300 grueling miles to Rome to gain Paul's counsel. The old apostle obliges while in prison by writing this letter which you carry back to Colossae.

Let's unroll that scroll and read Colossians 4:1-18 (p. 1073 Good News Translation):

1 *Masters, be fair and just in the way you treat your slaves. Remember that you too have a Master in heaven.*

2 *Be persistent in prayer, and keep alert as you pray, giving thanks to God. 3 At the same time pray also for us, so that God will give us a good opportunity to preach His message about the secret of Christ. For that is why I am now in prison. 4 Pray, then, that I may speak, as I should, in such a way as to make it clear.*

5 *Be wise in the way you act toward those who are not believers, making good use of every opportunity you have. 6 Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone.*

7 *Our dear friend Tychicus, a faithful worker and fellow servant in the Lord's work, will give you all the news about me. 8 That is why I am sending him to you, to cheer you up by telling you how all of us are getting along. 9 With him goes Onesimus, that dear and faithful friend, who belongs to your group. They will tell you everything that is happening here.*

10 Aristarchus, who's in prison with me, sends greetings. So does Mark, Barnabas' cousin. (You have received instructions to welcome Mark if he comes.) **11** Joshua, also called Justus, sends greetings. These three are the only Jewish believers who work with me for the Kingdom of God, and they have been a great help to me.

12 Greetings from Epaphras, another member of your group and a servant of Christ Jesus. He always prays fervently for you, asking God to make you stand firm as mature, fully convinced Christians in complete obedience to God's will. **13** I can personally testify to his hard work for you and the people in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

14 Luke, our dear doctor, and Demas send you their greetings. **15** Give our best wishes to the believers in Laodicea and Nympha and the church in her house. **16** After you read this, make sure it is read also in the church at Laodicea. You are to read the letter which the believers in Laodicea will send you. **17** Tell Archippus, 'Be sure to finish the task you were given in the Lord's service.' **18** With my own hand I write this: Greetings from Paul. Do not forget my chains! May God's grace be with you."

DISCUSS: What in this chapter can you apply to your life today?

The Cost of Freedom

It's easy to overlook the awful price our predecessors paid to set the table for the life we're blessed to enjoy. Take Paul. **Let's read 2 Corinthians 11:23b-12:10 (p. 1052):**

"23b ... I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. **24** Five times I was given the 39 lashes by the Jews; **25** three times I was whipped by the Romans; once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks; once I spent 24 hours in the water. **26** In my travels I have been in danger from floods, robbers, my own people and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, the wilds, on the high seas and dangers from false friends. **27** There has been work and toil; often without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty, often without enough food, shelter or clothing. **28** Not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. **29** When someone is weak, I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress.

30 If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am. **31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus—blessed be His name forever!—knows I'm not lying. **32** In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas placed guards at the city

gates to arrest me. **33** But I was let down in a basket through an opening in the wall and escaped.

1 I have to boast, even though it doesn't do any good. But I will now talk about visions and revelations given me by the Lord. **2** I know a certain Christian man who 14 years ago was snatched up to the highest heaven (I do not know whether this actually happened or whether he had a vision—only God knows). **3-4** I repeat, I know that this man was snatched to Paradise (again, I do not know whether this actually happened or whether it was a vision—only God knows), and there he heard things which cannot be put into words, things human lips may not speak. **5** So I will boast about this man—but I will not boast about myself, except the things that show how weak I am. **6** If I wanted to boast, I would not be a fool because I would be telling the truth. But I will not boast, because I do not want any of you to have a higher opinion of me than you have as a result of what you have seen me do and heard me say.

7 But to keep me from being puffed up with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, I was given a painful physical ailment which acts as Satan's messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud. **8** Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked Him to take it away. **9** But His answer was: "My grace is all you need, for My power is greatest when you are weak." I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. **10** I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul is willing to pay any price to tell everyone that God loves them, has totally forgiven *all* their sins, and is the only Way to heaven (John 10:25-29; 14:6). Beheaded by Nero, Paul gave his life to get God's life-saving message to you and me.

DISCUSS: When should you tell someone about life after death, that their choice determines their destination (Hebrews 9:27; John 3:36)?

Where would we be if Paul had not suffered and been martyred? His credentials earned him the gravitas to declare something that, in any other setting, is beyond egotistic, i.e., "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). **Let's read Philippians 3:2-15, p. 1068:**

"2 Watch out for those who do evil things, those dogs, those who insist on cutting the body. **3** It is we, not they, who received the true circumcision, for we worship God by means of his Spirit and rejoice in our life in union with Christ Jesus. We do not put any trust in external ceremonies. **4** I could, of course, put my trust in such things. If any of

you think you can trust in external ceremonies, I have even more reason to feel that way. 5 I was circumcised when I was a week old. I am an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Benjamin, a pure-blooded Hebrew. As far as keeping the Jewish Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee, 6 so zealous that I persecuted the church. As far as a person can be righteous by obeying the commands of the Law, I was without fault. 7 But all those things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake. 8 Not only those things; I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it all as mere garbage, so that I may gain Christ 9 and be completely united with Him. I no longer have a righteousness of my own, the kind gained by obeying the Law. I now have the righteousness from God that is based on faith. 10 All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of His resurrection, to share in His sufferings and become like Him in His death, 11 in the HOPE that I myself will be raised from death to life.

12 I do not claim that I have already succeeded or become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to Himself. 13 Of course, my friends, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what's behind me and do my best to reach what's ahead. 14 So I run straight toward the goal to win the prize which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above. 15 All of us who are spiritually mature should have this same attitude. But if some of you have a different attitude, God will make this clear to you."

DISCUSS: Who and how were you introduced to Jesus?

*Colossal Highlights
The Pearl from Ch. 1*

Paul is the only Bible author who reveals "the secret" (also called "the mystery"), thereby completing God's rollout about what Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection:

1:25 I have been made a servant of the church by God who gave me this task to perform for your good. It is the task of fully proclaiming His message 26 which is the secret He hid through all past ages from all human beings but has now revealed to His people. 27 God's plan is to make known His secret to His people, this rich, glorious secret which He has for all peoples. And the secret is that Christ is in you which means that you will share in the glory of God. "
(Colossians 1:25-27, p. 1071)

DISCUSS: Why did God keep "the secret" a secret (Proverbs 25:2)?

The HOPE Diamond in Ch. 2

Paul knows why he's stayin' alive. Life for him is all about helping others to "know God's secret which is Christ Himself. (Jesus) is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge" (Philippians 1:20-24; Colossians 2:2-3). Considering Paul's past record of trashing the One who's now his Savior, can you imagine the rush he gets in telling this to the folks in Colossae:

"11 *In union with Christ you were circumcised, not with the circumcision that is made by human beings, but the circumcision made by Christ which consists of being freed from the power of this sinful self. 12* *For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ through your faith in the active power of God who raised Him from death. 13* *You were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were Gentiles without the Law. But God has now brought you to life with Christ. God forgave us all our sins; 14* *He canceled the unfavorable record of our debts with its binding rules and did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross."* (Colossians 2:11-14).

DISCUSS: What does it mean to be "in Christ?"

The Nugget in Ch. 3

Paul says our *old nature* died on the cross with Jesus. Our *new man* rose to life when He was resurrected. We experience this new life by putting off the old man and putting on the new. **Let's read Colossians 3:1-5, 12-15, p. 1071:**

"1 *You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things in heaven where Christ sits on His throne at the right side of God. 2* *Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth. 3* *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4* *Your real life is Christ. When He appears, you will appear with Him and share His glory! 5* *Put to death the earthly desires at work in you such as sexual immorality, indecency, lust, evil passions and greed, i.e., idolatry.*

12 *You are the people of God; He loved you and chose you for His own. So you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13* *Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another*

as the Lord has forgiven you. **14** To all these qualities add love which binds all things together in perfect unity. **15** The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful.”

DISCUSS: How do we set our hearts on heavenly things?

*Under The Covers Boss
Colossians 4:1*

Paul’s fitting epitaph could be: “Jesus is all that matters.” In ch. 3 the apostle gives us God’s “how to” conduct ourselves in every area -- at home, at work. Submission is a word often used to imply a domineering spirit. But treating others like that would violate Paul’s admonition to “submit to one another” as Christ did by submitting to His Father. **Let’s read about the kind of submission 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, p. 1041:**

1** I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. **2** I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—but if I have no love, I am nothing. **3** I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned—**but if I have no love, this does me no good.

***4** Love is patient and kind; not jealous, conceited or proud; **5** not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; **6** love is not happy with evil but is happy with truth. **7** Love never gives up; and its faith, **HOPE** and patience never fail.*

***8** Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass. **9** For our gifts of knowledge and inspired messages are only partial; **10** but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear.*

***11** When I was a child, my speech, feelings and thinking were those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways. **12** What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be as complete as God’s knowledge of me. **13** Meanwhile these three remain: faith, **HOPE** and love; and the greatest of these is love.”*

The Bible’s original manuscripts did not use paragraphs and verses, so it’s odd to have Paul instruct us on how to live as husbands, fathers and employees, then let

his remarks to employers dangle by itself at the top of ch. 4. It's like a Post-it, reminding us that whether we're a follower or a leader, we answer to God.

DISCUSS: What role does HOPE play in your life?

Pandemic death is all around us, frightening at most, sobering at least, making this prime time to review God's promises, to remember that we're always in His presence. He's our Protector. He knows when we'll draw our last breath (Psalm 139:16). Resting in His peace, the kind the world cannot give, we can live worry-free by placing our trust in God's trustworthy hands.

In Closing
Colossians 4:2-6

Paul's greatest joy is offering eternal life, including his captive audience of prison guards and Caesar's staff. John Eldredge in *Wild at Heart* states, "Even if he can't put it into words, every man is haunted by the question, 'Have I got what it takes when it counts?'" Paul yearns to supply the answer by clearly unpacking "the secret."

From Rome With Love
Colossians 4:7-18

A total Type A, Paul invests in people, alerting them to their choice to say "yes" to Christ. "The secret" is the game-changer. You have new life because Christ is in you, and you're in Him.

You are "in Christ, aren't you?" God the Father accepted His Son's sacrifice as full payment for your sins – past, present and future. He's made the deposit in your account. All that remains is for you to endorse His check by placing your faith in His promise of life. If you've never taken that step, now's the time. There's **HOPE**, my friend. Say "yes" to Jesus, and you'll never walk alone.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH3qHhE6QgA>

There's HOPE!"

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Joshua 10:25 Joshua said to his officers, "Don't be afraid or discouraged. Be determined and confident because this is what the Lord is going to do to all your enemies."

*Job 5:16 He gives **HOPE** to the poor and silences the wicked.*

*Job 11:18-19 ¹⁸ You will live secure and full of **HOPE** God will protect you and give you rest. ¹⁹ You won't be afraid of your enemies; many people will ask you for help.*

Psalms 3:2-6 They talk about Me and say, "God will not help him." ³ But you, O Lord, are always my shield from danger; You give me victory and restore my courage. ⁴ I call to the Lord for help, and from His sacred hill He answers me. ⁵ I lie down and sleep, and all night long the Lord protects me. ⁶ I am not afraid of the thousands of enemies who surround me on every side.

Psalms 16:9-11 **9** And so I am thankful and glad, and I feel completely secure **10** because you protect me from the power of death. I have served you faithfully, and you will not abandon me to the world of the dead. **11** You will show me the path that leads to life; your presence fills me with joy and brings me pleasure forever.

Psalms 31:24 Be strong, be courageous, all you that **HOPE** in the LORD.

Psalms 33:22 May your constant love be with us, LORD, as we put our **HOPE** in You.

Psalms 42:11 Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled? I will put my **HOPE** in God, and once again I will praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalms 71:5-6 **5** Sovereign LORD, I put my **HOPE** in you; I have trusted in you since I was young. **6** I have relied on you all my life; You have protected me since the day I was born. I will always praise you.

Psalms 119:114 You are my defender and protector; I put my **HOPE** in your promise.

Psalms 130:5-6 **5** I wait eagerly for the LORD's help, and in His word I trust. **6** I wait for the Lord more eagerly than sentries wait for the dawn—than sentries wait for the dawn.

Psalm 147:10-11 **10** His pleasure is not in strong horses, nor is His delight in brave soldiers; **11** but He takes pleasure in those who honor Him, in those who trust in His constant love.

Proverbs 13:12 HOPE deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Isaiah 40:31 But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 17:7 But I will bless the person who puts His trust in Me.

Jeremiah 29:11 I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you HOPE for.

Lamentations 3:24-27 The Lord is all I have, and so in Him I put my HOPE. 25 The LORD is good to everyone who trusts in Him, 26 So it is best for us to wait in patience—to wait for Him to save us—27 And it is best to learn this patience in our youth.

Micah 7:7 But I will watch for the LORD; I will wait confidently for God, who will save me. My God will hear me.

Romans 5:1-5 1 Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 He has brought us by faith into this experience of God's grace, in which we now live. And so we boast of the HOPE we have of sharing God's glory! 3 We also boast of our troubles because we know that trouble produces endurance, 4 endurance brings God's approval, and His approval creates HOPE. 5 This HOPE does not disappoint us, for God has poured out His love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.

Romans 8:24-25 For it was by HOPE that we were saved; but if we see what we HOPE for, then it is not really HOPE. For who of us HOPEs for something we see? 25 But if we HOPE for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:28 We know that in all things God works for good with those who love Him, those whom He has called according to His purpose.

Romans 12:12 "Be joyful in HOPE, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer."

Romans 15:4 Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have **HOPE** through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us.

Romans 15:13 May God, the source of **HOPE**, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in Him, so that your **HOPE** will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 13:13 Meanwhile these three remain: faith, **HOPE** and love; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 15:19 If our **HOPE** in Christ is good for this life only and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 **16** For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day after day. **17** And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. **18** For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever.

Ephesians 1:18-20 **18** I ask that your minds may be opened to see His light so that you will know what is the **HOPE** to which He has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings He promises His people, **19** and how very great is His power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength **20** which He used when He raised Christ from death and seated Him at his right side in the heavenly world.

Philippians 1:6 And so I am sure that God who began this good work in you will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:8b We must wear faith and love as a breastplate and our **HOPE** of salvation as a helmet.

Titus 1:1-3 **1** From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was chosen and sent to help the faith of God's chosen people and to lead them to the truth taught by our religion **2** which is based on the **HOPE** for eternal life. God, who does not lie, promised us this life before the beginning of time, **3** and at the right time He revealed it in His message. This was entrusted to me, and I proclaim it by order of God our Savior.

Titus 2:11-14 **11** For God has revealed His grace for the salvation of all people. **12** That grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world, **13** as we wait

for the blessed Day we **HOPE** for, when the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ will appear. **14** He gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to Him alone and are eager to do good.

Titus 3:6-8a **6** God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior **7** so that by His grace we might be put right with God and come into possession of the eternal life we **HOPE** for. **8** This is a true saying.

Hebrews 6:18b-19a We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a **HOPE** that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

Hebrews 11:1 To have faith is to be sure of the things we **HOPE** for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. **2** It was by their faith that people of ancient times won God's approval.

1 Peter 1:3-5 **3** Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of His great mercy He gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living **HOPE**, **4** and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for His people. He keeps them for you in heaven where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away. **5** They are for you who through faith are kept safe by God's power for the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

1 Peter 3:15b-16a Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the **HOPE** you have in you, **16** but do it with gentleness and respect.

1 John 3:2-3 My dear friends, we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He really is. **3** Everyone who has this **HOPE** in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure.

His Deal
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