

Open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 4. We have just two weeks left in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae. To bring you up to speed on where we are: Two weeks ago we finished what is known as the household rules. So after laying down the gospel, after spending quite a few chapters explaining that Jesus Christ came to earth for the purpose of dying and then raising again as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, and describing how that sacrifice leads us to give up our old life to take on the life of Jesus, Paul gave us some practical insight on what it means to live that out in some very practical ways: husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, bosses.

Last time we got together, we spent some time looking at work. Specifically the fact that God calls us to the places that we are. He has put us in jobs, families, and communities to work for their greater good. TO WORK HEARTILY AS IF WE WERE WORKING FOR GOD NOT FOR MEN. But Paul now takes this one step further. He also says that we have been called to specific people. **We have been put in specific places, for the sake of specific individuals.** We do not know the details of the plan of God, we do not know who and how He intends to win people to Himself, but we do know that He intends to do it. More than that, we know that He will do it through human agents. He will bring people into the kingdom of God through the work of His ambassadors here on earth (that's you, if you are a Christian). So we jump into the text, looking for some guidance on what it is that we are called to as Christians:

Preparing your Heart

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.

For an action-oriented society this is a frustrating few verses. We want a punch list. We want bullet points. We want Paul to simply say, Go do this, this, and that. But he doesn't. Instead he says, PRAY. You are to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded, and to begin; PRAY.

I truly believe that if we saw prayer as Paul presents it here, we would not only find time to pray, we would recognize that we NEED PRAYER. That prayer is not just the act of us asking God for something, but it is also the work of Him on us. **The act of prayer is how God to aligns our will with His.** Prayer helps us to see ourselves in relation to God. It is us coming before He who holds all things together so that we may be a part of all things being held together. It is ultimately a *humble acknowledgement of helplessness and dependence*. Prayer then is less about DOING and more about SEEING.

Paul lays out for us three characteristics our prayer life should hold. He says our prayer should be:

1. Consistent:

Our prayer should not simply be resigned to those times and situations when the world seems to be crashing down. Most people have been in that position where you are totally helpless. Where you reach the end of your rope and cry to God: help me! But these are the situations that even the least religious people will turn to God. As a last ditch effort to save them. When nothing else has worked and one last try is considered. As Christians, it is not that we do not pray when our backs are against the wall, it is that we recognize that our backs are ALWAYS against the wall. That we are never able to handle it on our own. We must pray ALL OF THE TIME, as a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless and dependant.

2. Watchful:

BE ALERT. Do not just pray for the sake of praying. Pray for action. Live your life in such a way that you are recognize where you desire Him to move. As God is conforming our eyes to see the world as he sees it, then we will more and more be seeing the places in the world where God is needed. His plan will be accomplished, but He desires us to be part of it.

3. Thankful:

God answers prayers. We too often go to God with a few requests a few times and then, not seeing these things done, give up on God. But if we are consistent and watchful, we will begin to see the moving of the Spirit. We will actually get a glimpse of God's specific working in the world. And seeing God work will bring thanksgiving. Even if He is not working in the way that you think He should be, experiencing the presence of an active God WILL spur you on.

Within the realm of Evangelism, the topic at hand, this becomes even more practical. We pray **consistently** because the task of changing people from lovers of the world to lovers of God is a transformation only He can make. We play our part, but we are just as dependant on Him in evangelism as we in the rest of our lives.

We pray **watchfully** because we know that God is using us. If we are called to be God's vessels of proclamation, then we must actually be proclaiming to someone. Paul prays specifically here:

that God may open to us a door for the word

He is praying for his own alertness. Not only that God would open a door, but that he would recognize that a door has been opened. We need to be in touch with the moving of the Spirit. There is no perfect checklist to decide what the perfect time to tell

someone about Jesus is. But if we are being watchful, that twinge of the Holy Spirit that sparks up, we might actually be willing to respond it.

We pray **thankfully** because we will see people won over to Jesus Christ. If the Word of God is being proclaimed, then God will show up. If we are relying on the finished work of Jesus Christ and proclaiming His grace out of sincere hearts, then we will have much as a church to be thankful for. And thankfulness will push us closer to God.

So we start with prayer, we start by acknowledging that the work belongs to God, and we follow by having a faithful witness in our lives.

Preparing your Influence

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

One of my pet peeves when it comes to evangelism is this fabricated system that people use to convince others to accept Jesus. I went to a college where evangelism was a hobby rather than a way of life. What I mean is, it was something that you did, rather than something that you were. So you would have evangelism trips, where you would leave the place that you lived and parachute in to some place with sole purpose of finding people to convert. Their churches had special services that were specifically for the sake of revival. And there is nothing necessarily wrong with this, but too often THESE MOMENTS WERE THEIR EVANGELISM. That was the fulfillment of the Great Commission. These kids feeling like they had done their part to tell others about Christ because they had spent Spring Break in Panama City handing out gospel tracts on the beach (yes they actually did that).

But what I see Paul talking about is not short term trips, but a life of evangelism. Just like consistent prayer, we see consistent witness. We see a way of living that is more concerned with being faithful than it is with fulfilling some kind of quota. Living a life that reflects the change that we are calling people to. Because if you are telling people that they are sinners in need of salvation, they are going to be looking for any and every reason not to listen to you.

They are looking for a crack in the armor. They are going to be expecting what they view as, the stereotypical Christian. They expect you to be: **Insincere, Hypocritical, Elitist.**

And the saddest thing about it is much of the time we are. Let's be really honest. The stereotype of Christians being these things was not created out of thin air. This isn't some unfounded attack. It is very founded. You can take someone through 'four spiritual laws,' with more concern as to whether you will be successful in this endeavor, than caring if this person is rescued from the flames of hell. THAT IS INSINCERE. You can tell people one thing, and then turn your back and act completely different. THAT IS HYPOCRITICAL. You can look down on people, not believing that they are savable. THAT IS ELITIST. All of these actions are contrary to the gospel. We are broken vessels,

but we need to be working on being less broken. We need to be living out the truth of what we proclaim. What we need to be better at reaching people with the truth, is a renewed sense of the truth in our own lives.

Evangelism is not about changing other people. It is about changing yourself so that God can use you to change other people. It is about loving God so much that His truth flows out of you. In how you live and what you say.

We have prepared our hearts through consistent prayer. We have prepared our witness through consistent living, now it is actually time to OPEN YOUR MOUTH.

Preparing your Words

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Paul doesn't just say speak, but once again he lays out for us what the nature of our words are. He says that our conversations need to be: GRACIOUS, SALTY, and APPROPRIATE.

First being gracious in our speech is different than being inoffensive, because the Bible clearly tells us that the cross is an offense (**Galatians 5.11**). It is not even possible to present it in some sort of more easily understood way because:

*the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (**1 Corinthians 1.18**).*

So being gracious has little to do with making some more acceptable version of the gospel. It doesn't have to do with respecting the other persons beliefs (if they are wrong). Instead, it is about having the grace of God on you lips. Speaking about Him, not in some sort of forced, turn on the talking about God breathy voice for a minute. Instead, the way you speak, the words you use, and the content of your discussion is inseparable from the New Life. As one pastor put it, we now belong to another place, we are strangers and aliens in this world that we live in, it would make sense that we have an accent. We will talk about God as an actual real God who exists and plays a role in our daily lives. We will speak tangibly differently than those around us. We will credit the grace of God for everything in our life. As Jesus reminds us:

*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (**Matthew 12.34b**).* Our speech is gracious because grace has overcome us.

Second, our conversations must be salty. This is not the first time that salt has been used to describe the life of a Christian. It was Jesus Himself who described us as the salt of the worlds in **Matthew 5**:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

So salt is tasty. But the thing about salt is not necessarily just that it is good, but that it brings out the flavor in everything. It means that our proclamation of the gospel is not just in a one time laying out of the plan of salvation from point A to point B. In the same way that we are told to teach our children *when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Deuteronomy 6.7)*. Our heart change affects the way that we see the whole world. We are transformed and given new eyes, so that we now have a vision that is distinctly different. When we talk this new way of seeing comes out in our voice.

Our politics are different because of the gospel. Our appreciation of media is different because of the gospel. Our view of family is different because of the gospel. Instead of trying to be more like the cultural norm, we are supposed to stand out as a flavorful example of an alternative. We season our speech with salt, not because we want to be salty, but because we have already been made the salt of the world.

Finally, our conversations are appropriate. I don't mean appropriate like they are always G-rated. I mean that they are the correct conversation to be having at the right time.

When I say right, I don't mean perfect. There is no perfect way to share the gospel. There is no perfect time. Sure, everyone has those stories where some guy comes up to them and out of the blue just says: What is the gospel? But that isn't the norm. Most of your friends and family are perfectly happy leaving the elephant in the room and not disturbing it.

But with each person there is a way in. With every friend you have there is a question in their life that needs to be answered. You may be the only one who has that in. It is your role to play. But when we here:

so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

We get a little nervous. I don't have all the answers. What if I try and fail? But this isn't about being the perfect theologian, this is about trusting God. Do you trust that God can change someone? Do you trust that the Word of God is the power to do it? Do you believe that you are empowered with the Holy Spirit to be an ambassador? The use the place that God has put you to reach new people for Him. When we get to the point of believing that He is SOVEREIGN, or in control of the ultimate results, it will change the way we evangelize.

I want to close today by outlining how it will be different. There are always two errors that people can make when it comes to sharing the gospel: they do it for the wrong

reasons or they don't do it at all. and for reformed Christians, those who believe in God's absolute control over all things, including salvation, the error tends to be the latter. If God is going to save His people, then we feel like it lets us off the hook. But as we see here, it doesn't. while it frees us from a results based way of looking at all things, especially people, it SHOULD instill in us a greater drive to introduce people to this God that we hold in such high esteem. So how does the truth Paul lays out here change our witness:

CONCLUSION

First, it will help us to evangelize **boldly**. We talk about the things we love. We preach to people about the things we are passionate about. An environmentalist does not keep quiet about the burning of rainforests, a Seahawks fan is not neutral about the Steelers. And yet most of us, and I include myself in this, are apologetic about bringing up Christ. We keep our GOD, the center of our lives, on the back burner so as not to offend or disrespect. But the greatest way for us to be hateful to others is to withhold the gospel from them; to not tell them of the ONLY way to be reconciled to God. When I say we evangelize boldly, I do not mean loudly with our chests puffed out. I mean we will share our faith in places where proclaiming Him is not our natural inclination.

God's sovereignty will cause us to evangelize **humbly**. Now humility might seem like the opposite of boldness that we first spoke of, but they go hand in hand. A quote from a great book, called *The Beautiful Fight*, sums this up:

True Biblical Humility breeds confidence. Many people consider humility a sign of insecurity, but when we accept the Bible's reality that God is already acting, already moving, and already directing the affairs of this world, we can rest in HIS capability, confident that HE has made allowances for our own weaknesses, sin, limitations, and lack of gifting.

Too often we think about evangelism as OUR work. But to recognize God's spirit is at work helps to take away much of the 'burden' of evangelism. God makes it clear that evangelism is not about us; it is about Him. He does the work, we just show up. The soil has been prepared, we just throw the seed. And we can't control what happens to it from there.

Which is why we evangelize **patiently**. That is the third characteristic. I think that it is fair to say that if you are bold and humble in your approach to evangelism that you will see more people fail to grow into mature manhood (**Eph 4.13**), than to actually grab hold of the gospel. And even those who may eventually come to live out a godly life, may not do it in your time frame. Depending on God's sovereignty means that we don't impose our plans on Him.

If man is in control of His salvation, than you can simply give him a few steps to walk through, a prayer to repeat, or disciplines to master. It is then up to him. If he fails to

follow Jesus, it is his fault for not trying hard enough. We can give him his chance, and if he walks, we never have to think of him again...he has made up his mind. BUT if God is in control, than who knows when God will choose to till the soil, or weed the garden. God may use something you say today to impact a life twenty years down the road. He may use the same words you have said a hundred times to stick the one hundred and first time.

It is easy for me to give up one people. More than once in my life I have written someone off as not worth my time. But more than once God has used those people to show me His true power. He has brought those people back into my life to not only rebuke me for my short-sightedness and my lack of faith in Him, but also to reveal how far beyond my realm of seeing He really is.

In all of this, we evangelize **prayerfully**. If God is truly in control, then we must appeal to Him for changed hearts.

When evangelism becomes just about what we say, we are only doing half of the job. JI Packer puts it this way:

There are two sides to the evangelistic commission. It is a commission not only to preach, but also to pray; not only to talk to men about God, but also to talk to God about men.

I pray that we become a church filled with people who hold the truth of scripture in both hands, working hard as we rely fully on God's power. And I close with Paul's letter to the Corinthians, in which he aims all, message and motive, back to God:

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.