

EVANGELISM AS A WAY OF LIFE Colossians 4:5-6

Colossians 4:5-6 is thematically connected to its preceding passage. In verses 2-4, Paul exhorts: “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.” In verses 5-6, the subject shifts away from prayer, Paul, and proclamation. But the great concern for gospel impact remains. But Paul shifts the conversation from his personal ministry and to the ministry of every believer. Paul and his companions were commissioned to declare the mystery of Christ. So was every member of the church at Colossae. So is every member of this church.

Every Christian has been called to be a witness for Christ. We are to proclaim the good news of salvation from sin by faith in the bloody cross and the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not all called to do the same kind of missionary outreach Paul did. But we are all called to be witnesses. But how can ordinary people like the Colossians – and you and me – do the extraordinary work of soul-winning? Colossians 4:5-6 answers that we can all join in the great work of soul-winning by embracing evangelism as a way of life.

In CECIL NORTHCOTT’S, *A Modern Epiphany*, he tells of a discussion among young Christians from many nations, who came together at a camp. One night, they talked about various ways to share the gospel. The question came to a young lady named *Maria* from Africa. She replied, “We don’t have missions or give pamphlets away. We just send one or two Christian families to live and work in a village, and when people see what Christians are like. Then they want to be Christians too.”

What an awesome strategy for effective evangelism! But it is not original. The Lord Jesus has providentially placed every one of us in homes, neighborhoods, jobs, schools, and cities. The Lord expects each of us to be living billboards that put the supremacy, sufficiency, and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus on full display.

**YOU’RE WRITING A GOSPEL; A CHAPTER A DAY
BY DEEDS YOU PERFORM AND WORDS THAT YOU SAY
THE WHOLE WORD IS READING, WHETHER FAITHLESS OR TRUE
SAY, WHAT IS THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU?**

That is the message of our text: Be a witness for Jesus Christ by how you behave and how you speak. Colossians 3:17 exhorts: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” This verse places the Christ-centered life into two categories: words and deeds. Our text expounds on those two categories. It teaches us how to act and speak as Christians to be witnesses for Christ by the way we live. There are two reasons why you should practice evangelism as a way of life.

I. YOUR WALK IS BEING WATCHED.

Colossians 4:5 says, “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.” The concern of this exhortation is focused on outsiders. They are unsaved people who have not trusted the blood and righteousness of Christ for salvation. They are also unchurched people who do not express their devotion to the Lord Jesus by joining in worship, fellowship, and service with the redeemed community of Christ-followers. Ephesians 2:19 says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” If you are in Christ, you should praise the Lord unceasingly for making you an “insider” for eternity by his amazing grace.

If you have not received the Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you are on the outside – without God, without Christ, without forgiveness, without hope, and without heaven. I do not say that to belittle you. I say it to invite you to Christ today. Run to the cross. And put your trust in his bloody cross and empty tomb for the forgiveness of sins. And you will be saved. God is able to take you from the outside and bring you into the inside. When God does it, he charges you to reach others around you who are still on the outside. CHARLES SPURGEON rightly said, “Our great object of glorifying God is to be mainly achieved by the winning of souls.” Verse 5 tells us how to win souls in practical terms: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” The word “walk” refers to the believer’s consistent conduct, course of action, or manner of living. It is about your lifestyle. If you are to reach those who are without salvation for Christ, you have to watch how you walk.

One day, FRANCIS D’ASSISI said to a young monk in his order, “Bother, let us go down to the town and preach!” The novice was delighted and obeyed with great enthusiasm. They walked the streets, turned down by-ways and alleys, made their way out to the suburbs, and finally returned by a circuitous route to the monastery gate. As they approached it, the younger man reminded Francis of his original intention. “You have forgotten, Father, that we went down to the town to preach!” “My son,” Francis replied, “We *have* preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behavior has been closely watched. It was thus that we preached our morning sermon. It is of no use, my son, to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere we walk.”

Your walk is being watched. Watched by whom? I don’t know. You don’t either. That’s the point. Because you do not know who is watching you, you must walk with wisdom.

A. CONDUCT YOURSELF WITH SPIRITUAL WISDOM.

Verse 5 says: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” Wisdom is connected to and distinguished from knowledge. Knowledge is the impartation of truth. Wisdom is about the appropriation of truth. Wisdom is the practical application of divine revelation. JOHN PIPER says, “Wisdom is knowing what to do for the glory of God when the rule book runs out.” To be a faithful Christian, you need knowledge of what scripture says. You also need wisdom for what scripture does not say. Wisdom is living out the teachings of our faith with spiritual understanding, discernment, and perspective. It is insight for living. How do you

get, nurture, and exercise wisdom? You do not get wisdom by time, study, or experience. Wisdom comes from God.

So let's begin with the ABC's of wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." The fear of the Lord will begin to teach you what you ought to pursue and what you ought to run away from. Here is another key to spiritual wisdom: pray. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Do you need wisdom for a decision you have to make, challenges you are facing, or goals you are pursuing? Stop spending so much time talking to family, friends, and loved-ones about what to do. Start spending more time talking to God about it. If you ask him, God will give you wisdom. But there is one condition. James 1:6-8 says, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Let me give you the master-key to spiritual wisdom: look to Jesus. Colossians 2:3 says in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." True wisdom is found in Jesus Christ alone. You ask, "How can I be saved?" Jesus answers, "I am the way." You ask, "How can I be sure?" Jesus answers, "I am the truth." You ask, "How can I be satisfied?" Jesus answers, "I am the life." In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." You need Jesus. You need him to save you. You need him to keep you. You need him to change you. You need him to lead you. You need him to strengthen you. You need him to you bless you. You need Jesus. And you play the fool every time you try to make it without him.

A wealthy Roman centurion had a hopelessly rebellious son. He also had a faithful servant named Marcellus. The man called them both in to inform them of his plans for his estate. He said to his son, "Because you have been so rebellious, I am making Marcellus my heir. And I am leaving everything to him. Because you are my son, I will grant you one thing from my estate." Wisely, the son answered, "Then I'll take your servant, Marcellus."

That is spiritual wisdom. You are a rebellious sinner who does not deserve anything good from God. Jesus Christ is the righteous one who deserves all glory, dominion, power, majesty, and honor. The only way we can become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ is to pick Jesus!

B. CONDUCT YOURSELF WITH STRATEGIC WISDOM.

Verse 5 says, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time." Literally, Paul says, "Redeem the time." It is an economic term that means to buy, buy up, or buy back. In salvation, God redeems us by paying the penalty for our sins through the life-blood of his only Son, Jesus Christ. And saved people are to redeem the time and make the most of every opportunity God gives us to exalt the Lord Jesus, edify our brothers and sisters in Christ, and evangelize the lost.

Suppose a wealthy man gave you \$1440 a day to spend. But you have to spend it. At the end of each day, what is not spent is lost. The same sum arrives every day until the end of life. Then an accounting would be made of what you do with the sum. There was \$1440 a day to spend or squander, to be used buying things for oneself or in helping others, to be wasted or trifles or investing for eternity. Every day God gives us 1440 minutes. You have to spend it. You cannot save up some of today's time for tomorrow. When life is over, there will be a strict accounting of what we have done with that time. We will give our accounting at the judgment seat of Christ.

Are you redeeming the time? Or are you wasting time? Are you making the most of the opportunities God gives you? Or are you missing opportunities because of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? All of us have wasted time and missed opportunities. But here are the facts of spiritual progress: You cannot go back. You cannot stay where you are. You must go forward. So stop living in the past and, complaining about the present, and worrying about tomorrow. In Psalm 90:12, Moses prays, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Make that your prayer. Trust God. Go forward. And use the time you have today to make a kingdom impact in this world.

The late Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, was a passionate soul-winner. Many assumed he had an outgoing personality to match his spiritual passion. But that was not the case. Bright said, "Although I have shared Christ personally with many thousands of people through the years, I am a rather reserved person and I do not always find it easy to witness. But I have made this my practice, and I urge you to do the same: Assume that whenever you are alone with another person for more than a few moments, you are there by divine appointment to explain to that person the love and forgiveness he can know through faith in Jesus Christ."

II. YOUR WORDS ARE BEING HEARD.

The ancient story is told of BIOS, a wise man of ancient Greece, who was sent an animal to sacrifice. He was instructed to send back to the donor the best and worst part of the animal. He sent the donor nothing but the tongue.

Our tongues simultaneously express the best of us and the worst of us. It is a sad indictment, sinful reality, and strange contradiction. James 3:10 says, "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." Words are powerful. Like nitroglycerin, words can heal hearts or blow up bridges. And the stewardship of your speech is an objective indicator of your devotion to Christ. In Psalm 19:14 the psalmist prays: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." In Matthew 12:34b Jesus says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" James 1:26 says, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless."

Mark it down: The Lord is listening to the words you say. In Matthew 12:36 Jesus says, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak." Non-Christians are also listening to the words you say. In many instances, they

judge the merits of Christianity by the words, language, and conversation of those of us who claim to know Christ. Colossians 4:6 gives three standards for Christian conversation.

A. LET YOUR SPEECH BE GRACIOUS.

Verse 6 says, “Let your speech always be gracious.” “Gracious” is the term the New Testament normally uses for the grace of God. Some commentators read this exhortation as a call to speak about the grace of God. But this passage is not about the content of our speech; it’s about the manner of it. Whatever the conversation, we should speak graciously. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Our words ought to reflect love, kindness, gentleness, compassion, and hope.

Sometimes we excuse ungracious speech by claiming we are brutally honest, when in reality we use truth as a pretext to express ourselves at other people’s expense. I am not saying that you ought to avoid truth-telling, rebuke, and confrontation when the situation calls for it. But the Lord would have us to say hard things in a gracious way. Ephesians 4:15 says we are to be “speaking the truth in love.” This holy balance of truth and love is all the more significant when it comes to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. We are to be faithful witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys or condemning judges. We are trying to win souls, not win arguments. We are to proclaim the name, person, and work of Christ, not promote our knowledge, experience, or maturity. Do not let lies, gossip, criticism, negativity, profanity, complaining, or backbiting to rob you of the opportunity to share the goodness of God, the plan of salvation, and the hope of heaven with lost people.

B. LET YOUR SPEECH BE SEASONED WITH SALT.

Salt gets a lot of bad press. It is blamed for everything from hypertension to obesity to heart disease. The need for salt is questioned. Its use is discouraged. And its presence on many tables is often more decorative than anything else. But in the cultural world of the Bible, salt was very valuable. In Matthew 5:13, Jesus says to his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth.” The significance of saltiness is also affirmed in Colossians 4:6: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.” In our idiom, we speak of salty speech in a negative way. We say, “Now, you can take this with a grain of salt.” But the word tells us to make sure our words are seasoned with salt. There are three implications of salty speech.

First of all, salt prevents decay. The ancients did not have refrigerators. They packed food in salt to keep it from spoiling. To season your words with salt means that our speech ought to be pure, wholesome, and honorable, so that our speech fights off the spoiling of society by corrupt, profane, and decadent speech. Likewise, salt provides flavor. As one boy put it, “Salt is what makes food taste bad when its not on it.” Salt flavors food that would otherwise be bland. To season our speech with salt is to not only speak wholesome words, it is also to speak winsome words. Shame on us for boring people with the gospel! We ought to speak in such a way that adorns the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thirdly, salt produces thirst. The more salt you intake, the thirstier you become. So to season your speech with

salt is speak in such a way that you cause others to desire the one who said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me.” How do we season our words with salt like this? It is not about communication skills, eloquent speech, or religious terminology. It is about speaking from a heart that is satisfied with Jesus. Here is some homework that will help you develop salty speech.

- **Meditate on the goodness of God.**
- **Meditate on the satisfaction of Christ.**
- **Meditate on the fruit of the Spirit.**
- **Meditate on the wonder of the cross.**
- **Meditate on the delightfulness of the gospel.**
- **Meditate on the hope of heaven.**

If you begin your day by drinking deeply on the satisfying taste of your life in Christ, you will be able to go throughout the day with your words season with salt. Psalm 34:8 says, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”

C. LET YOUR SPEECH BE CAREFUL.

Verse 6 says: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” This is what lifestyle evangelism is all about. If your conduct and speech is consistently Christlike, the non-Christians in your life will eventually begin to take notice. They will notice something different about the way you walk and talk. At some point, the Lord may open a door and they ask what is it that makes you act and talk differently. And you’ll be able to answer them. When you get that opportunity, don’t talk about yourself. Tell them about Jesus. 1 Peter 3:15 says: “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

Verse 6 says you will be able to answer each one. That reference to each one tells us the Lord does not expect us to depend on cookie-cutter programs, tracts, or outlines in our witness. People are different. Their needs, understanding, and readiness are different. But if you live in such a way to be witness for Christ at anytime, he will show you how to answer each one.

Let me close by giving you words of good news. First of all, there is no one beyond the reach of God’s amazing grace. We must not give up on anybody. I have hope for everyone to be saved. Not because I believe everyone will be saved; but because I believe that God can save anybody. I’ve seen him do it too many times. There is no one whose heart is too hard for the Lord to reach. Don’t give up. Don’t quit witnessing. Don’t stop praying. God can reach them. Not only is there no one beyond God’s reach; but when God reaches someone, he never leaves him or her where he finds them.