

Remember that Paul has been reminding his readers, the Colossians, and through them to us, that God has worked a miracle to fix our pitiful condition, of our sin and rebellion against Him which broke our world. This good news is that we can be right with Him, by being united to Jesus, His Son, and that this is the exclusively ordained means of our reconciliation with Him, the Creator, of our restoration from the brokenness and wickedness of this age, and, frankly the only ultimate solution to every human problem.

Now, there are implications to the work of God in uniting us to His Son, primarily that we entrust ourselves to Him alone, and also that **this gospel of God’s great gift, ought result in a complete transformation in the way that we view *everything*.** The world, ourselves, our relationships, our understanding of power, of belonging, of significance, of honor; these are all changed in the light of Christ Jesus *for us*. He is our representative, and we are bound to Him in a representative united way, like a husband to a wife. Whatever He says and does applies to us, and whatever we have said and done are borne up by Him. In this great union, by God’s grace, our sins are imputed to Christ Jesus and He bears them up on the cross, and His perfect obedience, in word, in deeds, in affections and desires, is imputed to us so that God accepts us as He does Jesus, as one in whom there is no sin, no rebellion, no imperfection of human fallenness at all, and through His resurrection, He lives to continue to represent us, to present us holy, blameless, and beyond accusation before God. Jesus is our only hope of our being right with God, and our only hope of all things being made right in the world.

Now, the means of others being united to Christ, of hearing this message of God's grace, is not primarily a matter of what we do, but is foremost a matter of prayer. Essentially, we are to pray for God to open doors for the gospel to be heard and to pray for those who are proclaiming that gospel, for those who have been called by God to take the gospel where it has never been proclaimed. Now, Paul is asking particularly, in vv2-4, that these requests be made for him and his team, who are imprisoned for the gospel and who want those doors to be opened, both figuratively and probably literally, as he looks at that iron-rimmed door of his cell, so that he might speak this great announcement. Not everyone is called to preach in this type of manner, or to go abroad and proclaim the gospel to those of other cultures, but we should always be praying for those that are, in such a way as he prescribes.

So, last week was about prayer, speaking *to* God *about* people, asking Him for opportunities and ability to speak the gospel clearly. This week we are going to look at what speaking *to* people *about* God.

Here, in vv5-6, we are all given a command concerning how we are to both behave and speak to those outside the faith. We are all commanded to be witnesses, to testify to God's grace wherever He has appointed us to live and move and have our being. This command, therefore, is given to help us communicate effectively to those among whom we live but who have not, as yet, been united to Christ Jesus by faith.

In this command we are confronted by the fact that **every Christian has the responsibility to live, to work, to think, to act, and to speak in such a way that our lives commend Christ Jesus.** We are ambassadors where He has stationed us, to live according to His culture, His values, and His purposes; for His glory and for His

renown. As those living for His Kingdom, it is necessary that we know why we are ambassadors at all. Why are we living for Him, if not because He has lived and died and lived again for us? There are reasons that we live the way that we do, and why we gather together on a Sunday to hear the Word of God preached to our souls, to pray and ask God for His Spirit to work in power in us and in the world, and to encourage one another in such knowledge and faith. It is necessary for us to be able to answer why we live the way that we do, value the things which we do, speak the way that we do, for the honor and renown of Jesus Christ.

And the comparison of the final phrase in v4 and v6 will highlight this necessity. V4 reads, “as *I ought* to speak”; and v6 reads, “you might know *how you ought* to answer each one.” Do you see the repeated phrase? Gospel preachers *ought* to speak. *All of us ought* to answer each person who questions our behaviors. In fact, the literal word here is, “it is necessary.” Ought and necessity. And, at the same time, do you see the distinction between praying for preachers and answering with grace? Now, clearly both involve speaking words, and both require the message to be spoken. But Paul and his team are seen as preachers and proclaimers of the gospel, apostles, sent to proclaim, to announce, or herald, the message of the King, as ambassadors bringing a one-sided message to be delivered. Thus, there is the idea of, like a sermon, one person speaking, or telling the story, and not necessarily of a dialogue, or a conversation. Now, this does not mean that Paul and the others did not have dialogues or conversations, but the emphasis seems to be different.

To those in Colossians, they are to know how to “answer.” That is, they are to be living their lives, under examination by their neighbors, walking in the light and

without pretense or deception, in such a way that raises questions by the world. An answer clearly requires a question, and the assumption of this command is that there will be a question by outsiders concerning those inside. Peter put a similar command this way, "...always being prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. Yet, do it with courtesy and respect..." (1 Pet 3:15b)

And Paul here continues the same pattern which he has used in chapter 3 to express the totality of one's living and one's lifestyle, by addressing **the two primary expressions of one's wants and will: the walk and the words**. Or, our behavior, the actions and deeds of one's life, and the speech which flows from one's mouth. Now, there is a single shared root between both of these things, between actions and speech. This root is the heart, the seat of the affections, the desires and hopes and fears of a person are expressed through their actions, but also through their mouths. However, each one of these is addressed in slightly different ways.

First, our actions, or our "walk", which was a typical Jewish expression of the day for behavior, is to be "in wisdom." Now, the fact that our behavior is addressed before our speech in how we are to address and relate to outsiders may be quite telling. Your life, your behavior in the world, matters greatly. In practicality, it may be the first thing people see concerning the Christ to whom you are united, and it may be the most weighty thing which they reckon as genuinely revealing what you actually do believe. Words are cheap, they say. Actions speak louder than them. Words are the counters of wise men and the coinage of fools, etc. And those who assume that Christians are to be speaking the gospel without concern for the wisdom and propriety of their behavior, as if it to justify immoral behavior, or that bullying,

aggressive, disrespectful, arrogant, behavior in evangelism because they are “sharing the gospel” or “telling the truth” are directly admonished here that such foolish behavior is to be condemned and brought under the reins of wisdom, which is why Peter mentions courtesy and respect as the manner by which we answer each one who asks about our hope.

It is also true, then, that foolish living, or living like a fool and not in the light of eternity, wasting our lives in drunkenness or immorality or greed, the “earthly things” which Paul admonishes in chapter 3, must be put aside. In fact, he uses the same word “walk” in that passage, and then goes on to express what such foolishness looks like: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and instead ought to be consistent with the renewal of knowledge after the image of its creator, where Christ is all and in all. Thus, the wise walk, the actions of wisdom, are laid out as the clothing of that new people, summed up by Paul as, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (3:17) Remember, “in the name of the Lord Jesus” means in union with Him, united to Him, as His ambassador for His purposes are our governing goal. We are to set our minds on the things above, which is what it means to live wisely before outsiders.

Our hope is not in the wealth of this world, so we ought not act as if it is. We give generously, loving with our resources to strengthen those who are weak. Our hope is not in gaining honor in this world, so we are humble and willing to be seen as losers in order to exalt Christ Jesus and build others up. We are willing to give up power because we are united to the Powerful One, so we do not wage war, personally or socially, in order to obtain the power or influence of the world. Our

leadership as husbands is different, as masters, as parents. This is heavenly wisdom, which James says is evidenced by “good conduct in gentleness” as opposed to “selfish ambition and bitter jealousy.” Rather, it is **“first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accomodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and without hypocrisy.”** (Jam 3:17)

The reality is that some of us find it easier to speak and more difficult to be wise in our behavior. Thus, we may justify our selfishness by appealing to God’s commands to speak the Word, finding ourselves speaking more and acting less. Such of us have probably heard something like this from outsiders: “Well, your life speaks so loudly that I can’t hear a word that you’re saying.” So, Paul confronts us to behave wisely, gently, humbly, in the character of the new man because of whom we are united.

Now, I think that this can be an encouragement for many of you. You may not be a good speaker. You may be intimidated by the thought of preaching the gospel to people who you don’t know, especially by the prospect of introducing a discussion about Christ to those who have not shown any interest. Well, to those of you, let us remind us that the first word given by Paul here is concerning our actions, our behavior, and we are being encouraged to live consistently with the gospel.

And it is true, I would argue, that Paul is merely reiterating what Jesus taught in his ministry. **“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven.”** (Matt 5:16) In other words, your life preaches what you believe. And the manner in which you live your life is to be full of good works as that which shines the light of God and makes His beauty visible to the world. In fact, the word here, “good,” is not the word *αγαθος*, which means

intrinsically good, like a good apple or a bad apple, but is the word *καλος* which means “attractive, beautiful, useful”. In other words, our lives should be attractive, helpful, useful so that we do not just do morally good things, but that we do good things in a good way, a beautiful, attractive way. It is possible to serve gourmet food to someone in such a way that it seems normal, unappealing, uninteresting, as if I served you prosciutto wrapped filet mignon in a plastic baggie, shoved in a crumpled paper bag with coffee rings on it. Or, I could even present it in a way which makes you lose your appetite. Katie and I ordered from a fast food place on the road last week where the drive-through server grabbed her cup by pinching the rim, placing two fingers inside the cup. It didn’t matter what was in that cup...Katie was not going to taste it.

It is also possible to serve something in such a lovely and beautiful way that it makes others long to eat it. Jesus said, “Let your light *so* shine” or shine *in such a way*.

What way? In the *καλος* way! In the beautiful way, attractive way, useful way, that men see such fine

works and glorify God as beautiful, makes them long to see His goodness, to know His beauty, to see Him.

So, what does this wisdom look like?

First, this wisdom is to be “towards outsiders.” This term is interesting, and not the only time in which Paul uses it. He uses it with the Corinthians, too. What it conveys to us is not something derogatory, but is simply descriptive, and the way in which Paul describes those who are not, yet, united to Christ Jesus is that they are

outside. All people are born here, naturally, as were we. We were once outside. Outside of God's acceptance; outside of God's belonging; outside of God's circle; outside the city of God; outside the household of faith. We were once enemies and rebels, hating God and each other, receiving unto ourselves what is due to our own wickedness. But, by the grace of God we were brought inside, not by what we have done, but because we were united to Christ Jesus, the ultimate insider, who brought us inside the gates, inside velvet ropes, and up into the presence of God as blameless by His blood, and justified before God through His resurrection. And what unites those inside is not ethnicity or gender or socio-economic position, or wealth, or the color of your collar, but one simple thing: we are all in Christ Jesus by faith alone.

Yet, there is a distinction. Jesus told us in John 10 that He is the door of the sheep, if anyone enters through Him, he will be saved. The way in is narrow, only through Christ Jesus, but there are those who want a wide gate, but it only leads to destruction. There will be a separation of those in Christ and those outside of Christ at the last judgment, and Jesus said that He will pronounce to those who are not united to Him by faith, "Depart from me, you workers of evil. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves are *cast out*." (Luke 13:27-28)

There are those who are still outside, because they have not been united to Christ Jesus by faith, and the way inside will one day be closed to them. But we are to labor to see outsiders come inside, and to those people we are to walk in the wisdom mentioned, our actions towards them should be beautiful, useful, and helpful. **We**

should be wearing the clothes of our union with Jesus: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness. Why? Because the Lord has treated us this way. It was not our own wisdom which brought us inside, so it makes sense that we should not hold their foolishness against them when it keeps them outside. And such a truth is not something which we rejoice in, but that we weep over, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem and the rejection of Him in its general population. It is a jarring truth, but it is true, and such a reality should compel us to live in such a way that makes the outsiders' eyes rise up to see Jesus, knowing that the rejection of Christ may be a response, but let it never be a rejection of His people because of our foolish behavior.

It is one thing to be told to treat other Christians with compassion, mercy, kindness, with beautiful deeds. However, here we are told to do so “towards outsiders.” And not only that, but these behaviors of beauty, these actions of attractiveness, these deeds of loveliness, are a means of “making the best use of the time.”

Paul uses a term here, “redeeming” or “buying back” “the time.” This is a difficult word to interpret in the context. It literally means, “buying back”. But, how do you buy back time? The ESV has clearly interpreted this idea as “making the best use” of it, but I don't think that really gets at the strength of the idea.

For us to redeem the time, or buy it back, it means that these moments, these wise actions and behaviors and lifestyles, come at our expense. They are withdrawals upon our accounts, just as the grace of God leveraged His own Son's blood from His own account in order to treat us with even the common grace of a day's breath. You, see to behave in wisdom means that we are treating others kindly and humbly at the

expense of our own honor, our own resources, our own time. It is seeing every moment towards outsiders as an investment in their good that is worth making. How can we do this? Because we know that our inheritance is not in this world's goods, or this world's honor, or this world's comfort, but in the presence of God, waiting to be granted in fullness at the day of our Lord's return. Love, the great ethic of Christ, leverages today's moments because we have an eternal estate without lack or need of any kind.

Therefore, live in such a way that leverages every moment, every interaction, every age, from the least to the greatest, for the good of the outsider, and to do it at your own expense.

And in the light of this, the second command is issued in how we speak, therefore, to those outside the faith: with grace. Seasoned with grace, says Paul. Like salt seasons food, it prepares it for consumption as that which is delicious, so our speech should be prepared and permeated with grace so that we might know how to answer each person who raises questions. Do you note the concept of the "how" that is throughout this verse? It is *how* we speak, not merely *what* we speak. It is not only when we are explaining the gospel, the message about the Christ, that we are to prepare our words with grace, or with generosity, or with kindness, but rather *all* our speech should be thus gracious. All our speech, from the interactions with the DMV teller to the manner by which we speak of politicians, to the conversation around the Thanksgiving table with our distant and obnoxious relatives, all of our speech should be prepared and seasoned with a gracious attitude and gracious words. Grace, that is kindness which is undeserved, should permeate our speech and

in so doing make conversing with a Christian so enjoyable, so delicious, that asking questions about the faith is a fearless endeavor because the outsider knows that she will be treated with kindness in the asking, even if the answer does not suit her. A person may want to know the reasons for hope, and even want to be included in the life of the believing community because of it, while still not grasping the sufficiency of Christ Jesus or the blessing of our union with Him. In others words, they may not believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord and yet still want to know Christians because of the fragrance of life among them. That is how our speech should communicate, and it must be prepared with grace, with kindness, in order to do so.

So, how are we to do these things?

Look at how Paul describes what our works and our words should be, and note how they are related to our union with Jesus! Wisdom should personify our works towards outsiders. But where does wisdom come from? He has earlier told us that “in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden”. Peter uses the phrase, “set apart the Christ as lord in your hearts” before instructing how we ought to answer for our hope. Wisdom comes from knowing Christ Jesus *as my sufficiency for all that I need*, knowing how all of God’s mystery is revealed in Him, and in joyfully submitting to Him as the lord of life. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and we do not grow in living wisely by merely trying harder, but by fixing our eyes upon Jesus so that we see Him alone as our salvation, nothing that we bring to Him excepting our sin, and only our sin. It is in seeing that Jesus came to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. That He did not come to save good people, not churchgoers or religious men. He came to bind Himself to sinners, and when we come to Him that

way, as sinners in desperate need of His salvation, of His grace, then we find Him more than suitable for our need, but superabundantly suitable to our need and extravagantly willing to save us, and then our hearts are filled with gratitude, overflowing with thanksgiving to God. If you have not fled to Jesus for your salvation, yet, because you think that you are not good enough, know that the only requirement that God requires to be saved by Jesus Christ is that you come to Him as a sinner, and nothing else. But if we sense that there is something in us, some good in us by which God smiles upon us, then we are not walking in wisdom, but foolishness.

You see, why do you think we are harsh towards others, or irritable? When you are irritable or behaving foolishly (anger, wrath, malice, etc.), then ask yourself, “What do I think that I need that I am not getting from this person?” Then, ask yourself, “What do I have in Christ Jesus, and is He sufficient for this need?”

On Valentine’s Day, Katie and I went to special Valentine’s Day dinner served at a bistro up in Anacortes. By the time I made the reservations, the earliest time remaining was 7:45pm. When we arrived, we were informed that they were having trouble with the kitchen staff, and we would have to wait. We were seated 20 minutes late. I was a bit miffed, but we weren’t in a hurry. Now, this was a four-star hotel, and this dinner was a four-course meal. You could choose the main course from four different options, and we both chose the beef. About 10 minutes later our server came back and said that they didn’t have any beef left. Disappointed, we each selected a different course. There were those around us who were clearly angry, and complaining loudly, and one patron even met eyes with Katie and mouthed, “you

too?” and then demanded that the server bring bread and butter to our table. As I am thinking about my wallet in irritation, Katie leans over and says to me, “This is one of the times that it’s really advantageous to be a Christian.” I asked, “Why is that?” She replied, “Because we can laugh at stuff like this. It doesn’t have to ruin our evening. We have eternal life, and this just really doesn’t matter.” That is walking in wisdom, and when the manager came over she expressed her gratitude that we were being gracious and not getting angry, and when she asked us how the pork was, we told her the truth (it was bone dry), but we laughed about it. The reality is that expressing grace and patience and kindness to a staff that clearly had a chef call in sick, or something, opened up this frazzled manager and relieved her of some of that crushing tension on her shoulders. And though she probably went home and cried that night, gracious words and actions drew her in and salved an open wound.

Why do we scream at the driver who didn’t merge well, or stew in bitterness when the kitchen cancels the sirloin? Is it not because we think that we *have* to have that lane? That we have to *have* that beef? That we *have* to get our money’s worth? That we have to have respect, or honor, or recognition, or even to be treated fairly? But, when we see what God has done for us in Christ, that He is all in all, that in Him we are made complete and fit to receive an inheritance that is eternal, unfading, and that we have all the honor that we need in the eyes and the court of God through Him, then why do I feel that I have to have respect? I don’t! That is how thanksgiving towards God for our abundant gifts in Christ Jesus kills our competitive

and comparative self-centered affections and behaviors. If you want to walk wisely, then “prepare your hearts with the grace of God towards you in Christ Jesus.”

Just like the metaphor of seasoning, of preparing your speech for the grilling that the world will give you, do the work before the fire hits. Now, I would like to say that I took that opportunity with the manager of the restaurant to give an answer for our patience, that God has been so patient and kind and generous with us by sending His Son, but to my shame, I missed that opportunity, and though she could smell the cooking of the gospel, I, ironically, left the gospel in my own kitchen. I regret this, but I tell you this because I, too, need those prayers to open my mouth, too.

Do the work of seeking and savoring Jesus Christ. Because He is the answer. He is the answer for your fears by becoming the greatest hope that you could ever imagine. He is the answer for your shame by sharing the greatest honor that the universe has ever seen, granting you His own inheritance and the belonging of sonship, of being a son or daughter of the infinite uncreated God. He is the answer for your guilt by answering for it with His own holy blood, standing in for you, becoming sin for you and bearing up the penalty of such sin in His own body on that tree. He is the answer for your death by His resurrection. He has the keys of death and Hades and holds in His hand all authority and power and rule.

And the good news, O Christian, is that you are united to this one. You are united to “the image of the invisible God, to the firstborn blessed one over all Creation, who is so significant that all created things were made through Him, whether you can see them or whether you cannot. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him

all things are reconciled to God...and though you were once alienated and hostile towards God in your mind and in your deeds and by your words, Jesus has now reconciled you to God in His body in order to present you before the Almighty as holy, blameless, and beyond accusation before Him. That is God's grace to you: His Son for you.

Therefore, walk in wisdom towards outsiders, wearing the clothing fitting to your new identity, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved by God: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, gentleness, preserving patience, forgiveness, and love. And let your speech be prepared by God's grace to you, so that it will always be peppered with grace towards outsiders, answering the questions which your beautiful works have raised according to the grace shown towards you and the hope of God's redemption that compels them, speaking the truth in love, with courtesy and respect, knowing that our belonging to God is not due to anything in ourselves, but solely to the grace and generosity of God towards you in Christ Jesus, who is blessed forever. Amen.