

## Our Responsibility as New Creations

*Colossians 4:2-6*

My wife and I have 4 beautiful boys at home. And one of the fun things about parenting is seeing them grow, and allowing them to take on more as they do so. I remember about 6 months ago when we moved them from their high chairs to the bench. It was a big deal. But here is the thing, with that privilege came responsibility. They had to learn to sit on their bottoms, tummy to the table (if I had a dollar), and not touch each other during meal time (we are still working on that). The expectation is that if they want to sit where grownups sit, there are certain behaviors that are going to be expected of them.

We also love giving them gifts. A couple weeks my dad delivered an outdoor mud kitchen that the kids love playing with. But here is the thing, with this gift comes with expectation that they are to share it with others. They are responsible for being generous with the mud kitchen with their brothers and any friends that come and play.

This concept of privilege and responsibility applies to our spiritual lives as well. In today's passage, Paul is making the point that while **the Gospel comes with incredible privilege, it also comes with great responsibility**. If we are going to claim that we are new creations in Christ, we are also expected to live like new creations in Christ. If we are going to receive the gift of salvation from God, we are also expected to share this with those who have not yet believed.

Today's passage is not a random collection of general exhortations. Paul deliberately moves to the climax of his presentation in his appeal for the Colossian church and us as well to take on the responsibility to share the message of Jesus with the watching world, both in word and deed. We begin in verse 2:

*“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”*

Paul is not telling the Colossian church to pray when convenient or when it feels right. This is no religious obligation or ritual Paul is asking for. To devote oneself to prayer is not the same as to simply dabble in something. Rather, their devotion to prayer ought to be a priority in their lives, both individually as well as corporately.

What kind of prayers is Paul advocating here in this passage? Is he just talking about praying in general about anything and everything? Of course, we know that all kinds of prayers are good and healthy for the believer. There are plenty of passages that tell us to pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. However, given the context of the letter at large, I think Paul has specific kinds of prayers in mind here. Prayer here is not simply an act of presenting one's personal wishes and desires to God. Again, there is a time and place for that. Rather, Paul is advocating for prayer that is directed to the fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth. Your kingdom come, your will be done. We see this because of what Paul says immediately after, that our prayer ought to be aided by watchfulness and thankfulness.

Throughout Paul's letter we see overtones of the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan in the return of Christ on display. There is this emphasis on the blessings that are to come when Jesus returns. If we remember back to chapter 1:12-14, Paul says, that God the Father has "qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light." Also in chapter 3, verse 1, Paul encourages us to "set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." Again in verse 4, he affirms the believers that "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Given these themes woven throughout the letter, we ought to read "watchfulness" with the return of Christ in mind. We are already "raised with Christ," yet we are watching for the day when we will "appear with him in glory." Our watching and praying is to be done in light of this reality. The return of Jesus in glory, and our union with him in that glory.

Paul also says that our prayer ought to be informed by thankfulness. Again, I believe that this thankfulness is rooted in the anticipation and fulfillment of Christ's return in glory. We often only think of gratitude as some expression of thanks for a prior act of kindness, and it is that. But again, as with our watchfulness, I believe Paul has a thankfulness that is forward looking in mind here. A response to God's future act as if it is already an accomplished reality. Here, thanksgiving affirms the certainty of the return of Christ in glory.

Here is a question I'd like us to consider for a moment. **How often do you in your prayer life contemplate the return of Christ and your union with Him?** In the midst of a broken world where it is really easy to become discouraged, full of suffering and incredible dysfunction because of sin (Ukraine, inflation), how often do you allow yourself to be filled with the comfort and hope knowing that someday Jesus is going to come again, full of glory, and we who believe will be united with Him in that glory? We are to anticipate this reality in our prayer life. This is what I believe Paul is getting at when he calls us to be devoted in prayer, watchful and thankful. Anticipating the day and living in light of it. Hopeful. Let us not become discouraged, but to set our confidences on that reality.

In light of this forward looking prayer life, in verses 3 and 4 Paul asks that the church of Colossae to pray for his ministry as well. He says,

*“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.”*

If you remember in chapter 1 verse 9, Paul tells the Colossians, “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.” Here, we see Paul asking for a reciprocal act from the Colossians, that they too pray for him and his ministry. He

specifically asks that “God may open a door for our message,” which is simply the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul knew and believed that prayer was the driving force behind his ministry. In all of Paul’s letters to various churches and people, Paul constantly tells us about his prayers for them, persistently, continually, with gratitude and fervency. Even his colleagues applied this to their lives. Next week we will look at Chapter 4 verse 12 where Paul mentions once more Epaphras, who “is always wrestling in prayer for you.” So the Colossians were to have an active role in the ministry of Paul through prayer.

Here is a simple application for verses 3 and 4 **Pray for Faith’s Missionaries**. Just as the Colossians were to join Paul’s ministry through prayer, we too are called to join in the ministry of our missionaries through faithful prayer. At Faith we support and send amazing people both locally as well as abroad who are serving the Kingdom of God fervently and faithfully. Are you praying for them? If not, that is ok. This is not a guilt trip. But will you this morning commit to devote yourself to doing so?

We want to help you do this. Just outside of the doors to the Worship Center there is a table with cards that contain the names of those whom Faith supports as missionaries both abroad as well as locally. For some, due to the sensitive nature of where they serve, their location has been veiled. However, I’d encourage you to grab one on your way out today and commit to praying for at least one of our missionaries. That God would open a door for the message of the Gospel to advance in the lives of the people they serve.

In verse 5, Paul transitions from speaking of his ministry and tells us that we too have a responsibility to live lives of influence with those around us.

*“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

By 'outsiders' Paul is referring to anyone outside of the Christian faith. It simply refers to those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They are our friends, coworkers, neighbors, and oftentimes family members. Paul says that we are to be wise in the way we act toward them. Biblically, to be wise is another way of saying to "walk in wisdom." As we live our lives in this fallen world, we need wisdom to make our encounters with unbelievers fruitful. Here is Logan's paraphrase for what it means to be wise in the way you act toward outsiders: "Don't be stupid with your unbelieving friends." Don't be a jerk.

Here is a simple yet sobering thought: In regards to the spread of the gospel, it matters how you live your life. It matters how you act and behave. Your life is a witness to the work of God. And this is not to mean we are to be perfect in what we do. But it should not surprise us that as new creations in Christ God would expect us to live lives of beauty and winsomeness. Are you living life according the *biblical wisdom*? You may be asking, how do I know what it means to walk in wisdom? Short answer: by daily submitting yourself to the Word. AKA reading the Bible and doing what it says.

Friends, it is my responsibility as well as your responsibility to read God's word to find out what it means to live a life of wisdom. To follow the ancient path. To keep in step with the Spirit. There is a grain to the universe by God's design, and it is through reading and applying the holy Scriptures to our lives that we learn to follow this grain and flourish. This is the primary way we will learn what it means to be wise with our unbelieving friends. God is faithful. He equips us to do this. Learn from God's Word how to live with biblical wisdom.

Paul goes on to say that we are to "make the most of every opportunity." In the original language, "making the most" translates a verb that can be literally translated as "buying out." The sense here is that we are supposed to snatch up every single moment for the Gospel as though it were a bargain too good to pass up. When Sonic offers their mozzarella sticks for a dollar, you betcha I'm picking up mozzi sticks on my way home from work. It's way too

good to pass up. It's the same with our witness to the world. We snatch up, we buy out, we make the most of every single opportunity we can to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

In these moments, Paul tells us that we are to make sure that our conversation is always full of grace. Paul is calling on Christians to speak with their unbelieving neighbors and friends with gracious, warm, and caring words. He is not saying that you pretend to be a nice person so you can manipulate your neighbor to coming to church. That does not work. Rather, he is saying, "Submit your words to God's grace and kindness."

The metaphor of "salt" clearly refers to the care in "choosing the right word." Salt adds flavor. Salt preserves. Our words should do the same. Believers are to present the gospel in a winsome way so that outsiders can be attracted to this message of salvation.

If you are feeling as though you don't have what it takes to do this, let me offer a couple practical tips on what it may look like to have your conversation full of grace, seasoned with salt. I want you to see that this is not for the spiritually elite or the bible academics, rather this is for everyone. There is so much more we could say about this, but I just want to provide a couple during our time together. Okay, these are really profound. You ready? First: **Rid yourself of all cynicism.** Let's be militant about ridding ourselves of all cynicism from our conversation. Cynicism is, increasingly, the spirit of our age. It is a tone that permeates our culture. Do ya'll feel that? Do I need to flesh out what I mean by that? It's everywhere, and it is so easy to let it creep into our own lives as well.

In Paul E. Miller's book *A Praying Life*, he says, "Cynicism begins with the wry assurance that everyone has an angle. Behind every silver lining is a cloud. *The cynic is always observing, critiquing, but never engaged, loving, hoping.*"

Friends, the world is watching us. And the words we use either give credit or discredit the integrity of the gospel we profess. We are to be the opposite of cynical in our cynical age.

Rather, we are to be engaged, loving, hopeful. What would people think of us if we never said a cynical comment? “What’s wrong with that guy?” If we were always hopeful. Not in a cheap optimism sort of way. Scripture tells us to be shrewd as serpents, but wise as doves. We acknowledge and combat evil with vigilance. Yet, we never lose our childlike spirit. Sometimes I think we are more shrewd than we are innocent. If I could swing the pendulum the other way, let us find a middle where we are both shrewd as well as innocent. Hating what is evil, clinging to what is good. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:3, “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.” Cynicism is a stumbling block.

Second recommendation for conversation that is full of grace and seasoned with salt (reminder, we are talking about making the most of every opportunity to share Jesus. What I’m talking about isn’t bible degree stuff. Everyone can do this): **Ask questions.** Use your words to ask people questions. You’d be amazed how people feel when you ask them questions about their lives. In a world dominated with self, it is absolutely amazing the trust you will earn with people if you simply show a genuine interest in their lives. Ask about their family, childhood, experiences, favorite movies, books, hobbies. People love talking about themselves. Ask them questions.

Make the most of every opportunity with your coworker, neighbor, friend. Get rid of cynicism. Ask questions and show genuine interest in those who don’t trust in Jesus. Do these things, and over time, doors will be opened, opportunities will be given for you to share Jesus. This is what it means to have your conversations full of grace, seasoned with salt.

Lastly, Paul says that the end goal in all of this is “so that you may know how to answer everyone.” When I first read this my initial understanding was that Paul wanted to make sure that we know all of the theological answers to everyone’s questions. Good news, that’s not the case. There is value in knowing the Bible. I’m not at all discrediting growing your

theology. However, I realized that Paul is saying something so much more than that. Paul is encouraging us to *see the person we are speaking with, their needs, their context, their life.*

Rather than be Bible know-it-all's, we are to answer or respond to each person as fits the occasion. In submission to the Holy Spirit, we are called to speak the right word, at the right time, to the right person. Every single person that we interact with is to be shown care and interest, not subjected to some stock rhetoric about God that we learned in a book.

This is highly personal and loving! Do you see that? If you are unenthused by prepackaged gospel speeches, this is really good news for you. We are to speak to the needs of the person we are talking with. Everyone is at a different place in their faith journey. How we speak to one person may be different from how we speak to another. By living with biblical wisdom, we are to appropriate our words for the needs of the person. What could be more loving!?! We are not talking robots, but redeemed humans talking to humans who need redeeming! Evangelism is not stale, static, and bland. It is vibrant because we are talking to real people. This is in line with Paul's instruction to the Ephesians in chapter 4, verse 29,

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

*This* is what it means to know how to answer each person. In submission to the Holy Spirit, we speak the right word, at the right time, to the right person. May our conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how to answer everyone.

As our children grow in maturity, Amy and I have every intention of giving our children the blessing of greater responsibilities and gifts for them to enjoy. We also expect that with these blessings, they also learn to use them wisely and share them generously. We are to do the same with the Gospel we've received. We have been given every single blessing that is in Christ. What are we to do with it? Share it with the world, both in the words we say as well as in what we do. Our lives are to be devoted to prayer, with an eye toward Jesus' ultimate



return, saturated with gratitude and thanksgiving in light of it. We are to join those who are sent from us in praying for fruitful ministry and open doors for the message of the Gospel. And it is not just for them. We too are obligated to preach the gospel as well. We do so with words and conversation that is gracious, warm, inviting, and full of love for the other person, no matter where they are in their spiritual journey. We are called to be active participants in the advancement of the Gospel. We are stakeholders. We have a responsibility. Let us pray.

Benediction: Matthew 5:13-16.