



SESSION OBJECTIVE: COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

To understand how prayer and wisdom support evangelism.

A Brazilian Barbecue

Some time ago, I was invited to officiate a wedding ceremony involving two young, wonderful people in our church. The bride had been a member in our church for some time, and her (then) fiancé started to come with her. Being that he was from Brazil, the reception at the wedding was catered by his Brazilian friends and family. The food was spellbinding. If you've ever been to a Brazilian barbecue, you know that they do a masterful job with steaks. I, being the aspiring home cook that I am, went over to investigate their methods. I was shocked to find out that they used no marinades, rubs, or spices. They didn't do any of the traditional things you would expect someone to do to prepare a steak for the grill. I asked them, what do you guys use? How do you get so much flavor out of the steaks? The answer? "We use a lot of salt." That was it. He told me, "You put the salt on the steak, and when you think you've put enough on there, you double it." I was shocked, that is, until I went home and tried. Then I was convinced. Salt is the most important thing in the kitchen, hands down.

In Colossians 4:6, Paul tells the believers in Colossae, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt." Gracious speech, then, is speech that is seasoned with salt. It adds flavor to your speech. It entices others to want to hear you speak more. Grace is the flavor we all yearn for more of. This week we will talk about what kind of witnesses we are to be to outsiders, and how prayer and wisdom aid us.

Prayer

The first thing that Paul addresses in this passage this week is that of prayer. An integral practice, prayer is exhibited in the Old Testament and actually demonstrated by Jesus Himself in both the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:7-13) and the so-called High Priestly prayer (Jn. 17:1-26). It's reasonable, then, for us to expect that prayer is a practice that we would be compelled towards by Paul as well. Below is a breakdown of the aspects of prayer that we are to exhibit.

CONSISTENT

The first thing that Paul says in verse 2 is, "Continue steadfastly in prayer." Though two words in the English, "continue steadfastly," is only one word in the Greek. It's the Greek word προσκαρτερέω (proskartereō), and it means simply, "to persist in adherence to something." Prayer is an action that is intended to be consistently executed. It is an action that we are to be committed to at all times. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to, "pray without ceasing." It doesn't mean that we never stop the active motion of prayer, but it means rather that prayer is to be a way of life. It's automatic. No matter where I am or what is happening, I am considering everything through the lens of my prayer life.

CAUTIOUS

The second characteristic of prayer that Paul mentions here is that it should be, "watchful." This brings with it the idea of alertness or preparedness. We see this word being used in several places, one of which is 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." There is anticipation, then, that something negative could befall whoever it is that is being prayed for. Prayer is not only to be consistent, but cautious of possible threats. Given the immediate context in verse 3, Paul seems to anticipate the spiritual warfare that one engages with during evangelism. Sharing the Gospel with someone who is lost is likely what Jesus had in mind when He said, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against you" (Matt. 16:18). An important and yet interesting contrast is given here too. Not only is prayer to be cautious of potential threat, but also thankful no matter what. He says that prayer should be, "watchful in it with thanksgiving." The two go together. You cannot effectively pray from a position that lacks gratitude. Gratitude is the foundation that prayer stands upon.

CONSIDERATE

Finally, Paul mentions the last aspect of prayer in verses 3 and 4: "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— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." Several things are striking about this passage. For one, Paul recognizes that evangelism is only as effective as God desires it to be. It is God who opens the doors to declare the mystery of Christ, not us. We are to pray consistently and cautiously that God would act. This means that as a one considers sharing his/her faith, prayer should precede the action.

Wisdom

The second major topic that Paul addresses in our passage this week is that of wisdom. He says in verse 5, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders." Having just discussed the possibility of doors being opened to share the Gospel because of prayer, Paul now moves to discuss our behavior when such doors have been opened. It's fairly easy to see how wisdom and prayer stack up against one another. Really, the major theme of this passage is evangelism. Prayer that is consistent, cautious, and considerate moves to open doors to speak truth into the lives of non-Christians, and wisdom is to be exercised on such occasions. Below is a brief outline of two of the things that wisdom does for our positive witness to non-believers.

THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

The first thing Paul says in verse 5 is that we are to have the right priorities. The idea present in this verse is that wisdom orients our priorities. If we act unwisely, we will do things that are not most helpful to sharing our faith, but wisdom put our priorities into eternal perspective and pushes us to do those important things first. You will hear adults say to children, “It is important to make wise choices,” meaning, “Make the right choices at the right time.” In the same way, the Scripture reminds us that time is limited and thus, valuable.

The verb choice here is especially interesting, as well. In our English translations, it is typically translated, “making the best use of,” but there is another more familiar word that could be supplied here. The Greek verb is ἐξαγοράζω (exagorazō), and it means, “to buy out of or buy back.” Literally, Paul is saying we are to, “buy back the time.” One other place this verb is found is in Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem (or buy back) those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” There is thought, then, that Paul means to correlate the ideas found here with Colossians 4:5. In the same way that Christ bought us back from the bondage of sin, we are to buy back time from the bondage of sin. Time, which was previously being spent on worldly, godless endeavors, is now to be redeemed by the redeemed.

THE RIGHT WORDS

Beyond having the right priorities, wisdom also orients our speech. It directs what we say and when we say it (and crucially, what we don’t say, as well). Verse 6 says, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Again, we imagine a conversation with a non-Christian as the context for this command. The point here is that our words matter. What we say (and what we sometimes do not say) plays a role in how we share our faith. It is not just the biblical content that we share with people, but simply the way we talk in general that Paul has in mind. If we share Gospel truths, but do so in the midst of defaming, dishonoring, and flagrant speech, we will not be walking in wisdom towards non-believers. There is especially a tendency today for Christians to post things on social media that make fun of individuals or ideologies that they disagree with (especially with regard to politics) that completely alienates lost individuals who share those ideologies. When they feel alienated, they stop listening, and thus, that door to share your faith with them has been shut. Christians ought to really wrestle with what they post on social platforms. Sometimes, a joke or a meme is best left in a text message to a friend or even better, not shared at all. Wisdom is meant to tailor our speech in order that we might have every opportunity to share the hope we have in Christ with all.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Colossians 4:2. What two characteristics of prayer are we to display according to this passage? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Matthew 6:7-13. Make a list of all of the different attributes of prayer that Jesus includes in this passage. What things stand out to you as particularly interesting?

Day Two

1. Read Colossians 4:3-4. What is the third aspect of prayer that Paul includes in these verses, and why? What is the purpose of prayer in this passage? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read John 17:1-26. Make a list of all of the characteristics of prayer in Jesus' High Priestly prayer. What details in this prayer surprise you the most?

Day Three

1. Read Colossians 4:5. How are we to "walk" among "outsiders?" What is one way we exhibit wisdom among non-believers according to this passage?

2. Read Galatians 4:4-5. Paying attention to the word, "redeem," how does this definition help you understand Colossians 4:5? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Four

1. Read Colossians 4:6. How do our words affect our witness for Jesus?

2. Read Matthew 5:13. How is salt used here? How does this fit into the passage here?

Week 12 Discussion: A Good Witness

Colossians 4:2-6 examines how prayer and wisdom affect our witness to a dying world. Evangelism should always be at least preceded by prayer (if not also accompanied and followed by it). We also should let wisdom guide our priorities and the way we speak, not only on spiritual matters but on all matters. Talk as a group about which areas you need improvement on and which areas you feel already sufficient in.

1. Icebreaker: When was the last time you prayed for God to give you an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone? Be honest.
2. How consistent is your prayer life in general? Be honest.
3. Do you agree that wisdom directs our priorities? Why or why not?
4. How much thought goes into what you post on social media? In other words, before you post something, do you consider what it might communicate not only to Christians, but also non-Christians? Do you feel like it is important for what you post to be edifying to all who read it?

5. Share with the group at least one person that your group can pray for. Ask God to open doors to share the Gospel with them, and that God would soften their heart to receive what you have to say.

Takeaways:

1. Evangelism should always be preceded by prayer (if not also accompanied by it and followed up by it).
2. Wisdom orients our priorities and our speech towards being an effective witness for Christ to a dying world.