



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

Prayer and Conduct

No. 11
Series: Colossians

Colossians 4:2-6

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Text

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ 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.

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Introduction and Context

Let's pray together...

As we continue through our series in Colossians, we are rapidly approaching the end of the book. We find ourselves today squarely in the fourth chapter, in a passage that marks the end of a major section of Colossians. This section began in Colossians 3, so roughly halfway through the book, and is mainly focused on very practical instructions for how Christians are to live. The section starts in Colossians 3:1-2 – “if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Paul commands the Colossians to be heavenly-minded, to seek the things that are above. The aim, the goal of their thoughts and their lives should be about heavenly things. And Paul fleshes out what that looks like in practical ways. First, in sanctification, both the putting off of sin in vv. 5-11 and the putting on of grace and virtue in vv. 12-17. Then second, in specific human relationships: husbands and wives in vv. 18-19, children and parents in vv. 20-21, and bondservants and masters in vv. 22 to 4:1. In our passage today, Paul continues on this trajectory, developing what heavenly-mindedness looks like practically. In doing so, he turns away from addressing particular human relationships and particular groups of people in the church. Instead, he now addresses the church as a whole, specifically instructing them in their prayer and their conduct. How they are to pray, and how they are to live as Christians.

But our passage today doesn't just mark the end of a major section of this letter, it also marks the end of the body of the letter itself. The rest of chapter 4, from v. 7 to the end, Paul sends greetings on behalf of various of his ministry partners to the Colossians as he brings the letter to a close. And so our passage today marks the end of the main content, the main meat of the letter containing Paul's doctrinal and practical instructions to the church that began all the way back in Colossians 1:15. What this reminds us, is that Paul's instructions for prayer and conduct here, as just like all his practical commands in this section, are grounded in his teaching on the supremacy and fullness of Christ from

the first half of this letter. Paul opens the body of his letter with the glory and supremacy of Christ over His church and even over all creation in chapter 1. It is because the Colossians have been so united to this One who is supreme, filled in Him and buried and raised with Him, that they should reject the false teachers described in chapter 2. Those false teachers seem to offer fullness, but in reality that fullness pales in comparison to the fullness of Christ the Colossians already have. And it is because the Colossians have been so raised with Christ, that they should seek to be heavenly-minded and work that out in practical ways in their lives, as described in chapters 3 and 4. The point is that who we are in Christ comes before what we do as Christ-followers. Right doctrine comes before right practice. Or, to put it another way, the indicatives, the facts and truths of the gospel, come before the imperatives, the commands for gospel living. And so Paul's instructions here on how we ought to pray and how we ought to live at the end of the body of his letter are rooted in what Christ has done for us and our identity in Him.

As we turn to our passage itself, then, let's consider it under two main headings: prayer, in vv. 2-4, and conduct, in vv. 5-6. Under each heading, we will consider three subheadings: first, who it is we are to pray for and live for; second, how we are to pray and live; and finally by what power we pray and live. So prayer and then conduct, and under each who, how, and by what power.

I. Prayer

I.A. Who We Are to Pray For

We begin with who to pray for. Paul specifies two groups of people that the Colossians should pray for: themselves, and then Paul and other ministers of the gospel.

First, Paul assumes that the Colossians should pray for themselves. We see this in v. 3 – “At the same time, pray also for us.” With the word “also,” Paul is instructing the Colossians to pray for certain people *in addition to* what they would already be praying for. He assumes that they are already praying for something or some group of people. Who is that group of people? Well in the context of this section in Colossians 3-4, it is the church itself and the various groups within it. The Colossians should be praying for their ability to fulfill the exhortations Paul has given them, to put off sin and to put on righteousness, to be godly wives and husbands, children and parents, bondservants and masters. And they should also be praying for their rootedness in the gospel, to know the glory and supremacy of Christ, the fullness that they have in Him, so that they would not be led astray by false teachers, taken captive by religious practices that promise fullness but turn up empty. Indeed, all these things are in line with Paul's own prayer for them, in the opening verses of this letter. Colossians 1:9-10 – “we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” Paul assumes that his prayer will become their prayer, to be filled with Christ, and as an outflow of that living worthy of Him.

Do we pray for ourselves? More specifically, do we pray for ourselves along the lines of Paul's instructions in Colossians, indeed along the lines of Paul's own prayer? It can be easy for our prayer to center around our own immediate wants and needs in this life, the earthly circumstances that come and go but nevertheless affect us deeply. Yes, we should be bringing these things to the Lord, but let's not make them to sole focus of our prayers. Rather, let's broaden our horizon and pray for the grand and glorious vision

of our lives laid out for us in this book. Let's pray to be built up in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, to know more and more His glory and supremacy above all things, to be so captivated by His majesty, so filled with His fullness, that we see any false alternative as what it is: empty. And let's pray that our heavenly-mindedness would manifest practically in our own personal holiness, and in the ways we relate to others. That is the grand and glorious vision of the Christian life. Let's make that the substance of our prayers.

But beyond Paul's assumption that the Colossians should pray for themselves, Paul explicitly instructs them to pray, secondly, for himself and other ministers. v. 3 — "At the same time, pray also for us." He broadens their horizon so that they would pray not just for themselves and their own ability to fulfill this grand vision of gospel life, but that they would also pray for the ministers who proclaimed this gospel to them in the first place. Paul asks them specifically to pray, in v. 3, "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." There are two requests Paul makes here: first, opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel; and second, clarity in the proclamation of the gospel. Opportunity and clarity.

First, opportunity. Paul asks them to pray for an "open door" for the word. This idea of an open door describes effective opportunities where the gospel was proclaimed. Paul uses this phrase when he returns to give a report about his first missionary journey, where he had seen many Gentile converts and planted the first churches in Gentile areas. Acts 14:27 says "they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Paul desires more of these kinds of opportunities for evangelism for him and his fellow laborers in the gospel, some of whom are mentioned immediately at the end of this letter in Paul's final greetings. And he asks the Colossians for prayer to that end.

But Paul desires not just opportunities; he also wants, secondly, to be able to take advantage of those opportunities, to proclaim the gospel with clarity. At this point, it is interesting to note that Paul describes the gospel as the "mystery of Christ." In other words, Paul uses the word "mystery" to describe who Christ is and what He has done. But this is not new. Paul has used the word "mystery" a few times in Colossians so far, and each time it refers to Christ. In Colossians 1:27, the mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." In Colossians 2:2, Paul writes very explicitly identifies this mystery: "God's mystery, which is Christ." But why does Paul describe Christ as a mystery? How is Christ a mystery if Paul has already explained to us so much of His preeminence and glory? Well, the term "mystery" refers to something that was not clearly or fully revealed by God in the Old Testament, but has been clearly revealed in the New. It's not something that was completely hidden, such that people in Old Testament knew absolutely nothing about it. Rather, it's something that was revealed, but revealed in an obscure, veiled, or fuzzy manner. Paul uses the illustration of a shadow and its reality to describe this idea. A shadow of a person reveals something about the person, but not in full detail. Look at Colossians 2:16-17 - "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." Paul describes the Old Testament Jewish dietary laws and religious festivals as a shadow, whose substance or reality is Christ. Christ in the New Testament cast a shadow, as it

were, over the Old Testament, and these Jewish dietary laws and festivals are part of that shadow. Even though they have to do with the ancient nation of Israel and may seem unrelated to Christ, they actually point above and beyond themselves to reveal something great, something about the Savior Himself. But they do so in a shadowy, obscure way that doesn't give us all the details about His person and work, just like how a shadow of a person reveals some things about a person, but not everything in full detail. However, when we turn into the New Testament, we have the full revelation of Christ in full detail. We see His identity as the fully God and fully man. We see His atoning work, taking on our human nature to reconcile us to God. So when we look back at the Old Testament, we can see with new eyes how all the promises are fulfilled in Christ. And we can see how various people and institutions in the Old Testament, yes even OT laws and festivals, prefigure and point forward to Him. To take a concrete example, think of the Jewish festival of Passover. This was a major festival that marked the beginning of the new year for the nation of Israel because it commemorated, in some sense, the birth of the nation itself, when God delivered them out of slavery in the land of Egypt. If you remember, Pharaoh was unwilling to let the people of Israel go, so God sent Ten Plagues to change his mind. The final plague had God send the angel of death to kill the firstborn son of every household. To protect the Israelites, God told them to slaughter a lamb, and use its blood to paint along the doorposts of their houses. So that when the angel of death came through, he would "pass over" the houses with lamb's blood. It was this final plague that caused Pharaoh to finally relent, and the Israelites were set free. God then set up an annual festival called Passover to commemorate this great event. To observe this festival, individual Israelites would have to bring a lamb to the temple and have it sacrificed (Deuteronomy 16:1-7), recalling the lambs who were killed so that the Israelites' firstborn sons would be spared. Now how does this new year festival reveal to us something about Christ? The main connection is that Christ is our true Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). He lay down His life as a sacrifice, so that for all of us who trust in Him, death might pass over us. And in His sacrifice, we might be delivered not from physical slavery to a tyrannical Pharaoh, but from spiritual slavery to sin and Satan.

This is but one example of how the OT is a shadow of Christ, how Christ is a mystery that is revealed obscurely in the Old and now clearly in the New. But Paul uses this language in the context of his prayer for clarity in the proclamation of the gospel. What is his point in doing so? Well, the point is this, that ministers are to *clearly proclaim* that gospel which God has now *clearly revealed*. vv. 3-4 – "pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, ... that I might make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." What God had revealed in a mystery, in types and shadows, He has now revealed clearly. And Paul now wants to proclaim that revealed mystery to others with similar clarity in His own preaching.

If you look at Paul's preaching in Acts, this is exactly what he did, especially with Jews. Over and over again, whenever he enters a new city he goes to the synagogue, the Jewish place of worship, and the repeated phrase that Scripture uses is that "he reasoned with them from the Scriptures." He showed them how the Old Testament revealed and pointed to Christ, that Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. And he proclaimed the implication of that fact for his hearers.

So, do you pray for your pastors and other gospel ministers, even missionaries. We should pray that they have opportunities to proclaim the gospel, that the pulpit they

fill every week here on Sundays will continue to remain open and won't be shut down. We should pray that when they take advantage of those opportunities to proclaim the good news of Christ they do so with clarity from the whole counsel of God, explaining the full scope of His person and work, and clearly showing how the OT points forward to Christ. Ultimately, we should pray that God makes these gospel opportunities effective and unbelievers will be converted.

I.B. How to Pray

We've considered who to pray for, ourselves and ministers of the gospel. We now turn to consider Paul's instructions about how to pray. He provides three characteristics of prayer for us in v. 2.

The first characteristic of prayer is that it should be steadfast. "Continue steadfastly." Paul refers here to the frequency of prayer. He doesn't mean that we should spend every waking moment of our lives praying. Instead, we should have a consistent and regular frequency to our prayer. Prayer should be a characteristic part, a habitual part of our lives, and not something we do once in a while, irregularly, only when we feel like we need it for some specific problem or desire we have. The reality is that we need prayer regularly, every day. Christ Himself taught us to pray for our "daily bread," the daily provision of our physical needs. And it is similar for our spiritual needs too. We need the grace of God for our spiritual growth, grace to, in the words of Paul, put off sin and put on righteousness, to keep ever before us the glory and majesty of Christ. So, do you pray regularly? Can you say that prayer characterizes your life? If not, let this be an encouragement to build one, even if it's five minutes when you wake up, or before you go to bed.

Paul's exhortation to be steadfast in prayer also means we should persevere in prayer. We should pray and never give up. How easy is it for us to pray for something, and then forget about it the next day. Or to pray for something, find that the Lord has not answered, and give up praying for it entirely out of discouragement. Whether that is some intractable sin or difficulty in our own lives, or the salvation of someone we love whose heart is hard towards the gospel, or even the ongoing gospel ministry of our pastors at IBC, we should not give up praying. Like the persistent widow in Christ's parable who went again and again to the judge pleading for justice until he relented and gave her her justice, let's not lose heart in our prayers. Is there something you've stopped praying for because you haven't gotten an answer and turned away discouraged? May this be an encouragement to pick it back up, to honestly plead and wrestle with Him about it, to pray and not give up, for God desires that we pray and depend upon Him.

Beyond just instructing us to be steadfast in prayer, Paul also teaches us, secondly, to be watchful in prayer. This has to do not with frequency of prayer, but with intensity of prayer. It is the idea that when we pray, we should keep alert, keep awake. We should pray with an attention and focus so that our minds don't drift away. And we should concentrate on the things that that we pray for so we mean it with our hearts, so that we aren't just mouthing a script in some rote, thoughtless kind of way. Jesus, when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane before His betrayal, told his closest disciples no less than three times to "watch and pray so that [they] w[ould] not enter into temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." And yet what did the disciples do? They fell fast asleep. They failed to focus and their minds drifted off to the point that they

drifted off to sleep. It is a dramatic picture of what happens to us when we fail to be watchful in prayer. Does your mind wander to other things, or even drift off to sleep, when you pray? Do you mean the words that you pray? Let's remember that when we pray we are communing with the very Creator of heaven and earth, who rules and reigns over all things, and who has brought us from death to life. We should come before His presence with, at the very least, a focused attention that is fitting for who He is. So let's heed this exhortation to be watchful, to engage our minds in prayer with undistracted focus and intensity, so that whenever we pray, we do so with our hearts fully engaged with God in His presence.

As we lift our hearts up to God in prayer, Paul exhorts us also, thirdly, to be thankful. This has to do with our attitude to God in prayer. If you think about being steadfast as sort of a horizontal regularity across time, and being watchful as a downward intensity, then being thankful is an upward response to who God is and what He has done. This is something Paul has commanded numerous times in Colossians. The most general reference is in Colossians 3:17 – “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” And Paul models this thankfulness in prayer in the opening of this letter: Colossians 1:3 – “we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” And this makes sense, because our ability to pray is made possible only because of God grace in our lives, for which we should be thankful. We see that in the fact that prayer is something we do explicitly in the name of Jesus. We end our prayers with the phrase “in Jesus name” in order to acknowledge that the entire reality of prayer is made possible only because of His work. By His sacrifice our sins are cleansed and we are adopted as sons and daughters of God, and because we are children of God we can pray to Him as Father. So we should be thankful because our prayer wouldn't even exist if not for the gracious work of God to save us, reconcile us to Himself, and adopt us into His family. Indeed, the main thrust of Colossians is that as Christians, we already have the fullness of Christ. So what more is there to be thankful for? We have Christ, and because we have Christ, we have everything! We are filled to the full. There is no other place we need to go to find that fullness. And it's in light of that fullness we already have in Christ, in light of the fact that we are already seated with Christ in heaven, that we can live in a heavenly-minded way that glorifies Him. So are you thankful when you pray? Or do you come to pray with a heart that is ungrateful, maybe even demanding or entitled? Let's heed this exhortation to be thankful. Let's rekindle that gratitude by meditating on the reality that we have been filled with Christ, that in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, that in Christ we are adopted as children of God who can cry out “Abba, Father” to Him.

I.C. By What Power We Pray

So we've seen who to pray for and how to pray. We turn now to consider: by what power we pray. What makes our prayer effective? How do we know that when we pray, that our prayers will actually be answered? The answer, of course, is God. God is the power behind prayer, who answers our prayers and makes them effective.

We see this in our text in v. 3 – “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.” It is God who

prepares the way for the message of the gospel. He provides opportunities for ministers to share the good news, in response to our prayers.

But notice something else as well. Paul mentions his imprisonment for the sake of that gospel. We find out that he has been locked up for preaching the good news. This is not an unusual fact – piecing together information from his various letters, we know that Paul was imprisoned multiple times. But what’s unusual here is that this is the first time in Colossians that Paul mentions his status as a prisoner. He chooses to bring it up here, at the end of the body of the letter, rather than, say, at the beginning. Why? Well, at the very least, this fact highlights and illustrates the power of God in opening doors for the gospel even when humans conspire to close them. You see, the people who imprisoned Paul in order to stop spread of the gospel cannot stop God, who opens up gospel opportunities in answer to prayer. Most scholars think that Paul here is imprisoned in Rome, and we read of the beginning of that imprisonment at the end of the book of Acts. If that’s true, then that would explain why Paul brings up his imprisonment in the context of the power of God. Earlier in Acts 23, Jesus appears in a vision to Paul and tells him that he must testify about Christ in Rome. At the end of Acts, chapter 28, Paul finally arrives in Rome after a long journey from Jerusalem. But he has been taken there as a prisoner, and when he arrives he is put under house arrest. How can he testify about Christ when he can’t go out into the synagogues and houses? He seems so close, yet so far at the same time. Well, Paul couldn’t go to the people, so God, by His power, brought the people to him. This is last two verses of the book of Acts: Paul “welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” The last two words of the book I just find beautiful. Paul is in so many ways hindered, unable to move freely. And yet his proclamation of the gospel is absolutely “without hindrance.” While Paul is powerless, God is powerful. And Jesus’ promise comes to pass. As Paul says elsewhere in 2 Timothy 2:9, he is “bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!”

Let this be an encouragement for us to entrust ourselves and our pastors and gospel ministers to Him in prayer more frequently, with steadfastness, more intensely, with watchfulness, and more responsively, with thankfulness. For we pray to a powerful God, who can answer our prayers in even the most unexpected ways. Through prayer, God’s power can turn even a prisoner into a preacher.

II. Conduct

We turn now from prayer to conduct, how we live, in vv. 5-6, indicated by the word “walk.” Walking is a common metaphor for the Christian life. The Christian life is likened to a journey, a walk. It’s not just about what you believe, as if you can merely sort of sit there and think. No, the Christian life involves action, movement, progress. It involves getting up and walking. And the direction that you walk in matters. You can take positive steps forward, or negative steps back. Paul in Colossians 3:7 mentions negative steps when talks about sins in which “you too once walked, when you were living in them.” Christians are not to engage in the sins of their former life. To do so would be to hinder one in one’s walk. On the flip side, Paul exhorts us to take positive steps in Colossians 1:10 to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” which includes “bearing fruit in every good work.” Let’s consider, therefore, what it means for us to make forward progress in our Christian walk, our actions and conduct. As with prayer,

let's consider three aspects of our conduct: who we are to live for, how we are to live, and finally by what power we live.

II.A. Who to Live for

Paul specifies who to live for as “outsiders” in v. 5. We are to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” These are unbelievers, people outside the Christian community. So we are to be conscious about how we live in and among the outside, unbelieving world. Notice that Paul's focus here is not on how we live among ourselves in the church, although we know from other parts of Scripture that this is an important aspect of the Christian life. We live not as isolated individuals but in a community, as the body of Christ. But here, there is a distinct focus on how we live and conduct ourselves in our relationships with unbelievers. The focus is not on insiders, but outsiders. And in context, it makes sense that Paul would have this focus here. There is a kind of a logical, outward progression in our passage today from the Colossians themselves, to Paul and other gospel ministers, particularly in their evangelistic efforts, to now the unbelieving world around them that they are trying to evangelize. An important implication of this is that we as ordinary members of the church have a role to play in evangelizing others and adorning the gospel with our lives. Gospel proclamation is an important job for pastors, but that doesn't mean that the rest of the church body can just sit back and live in a secluded bubble while our pastors interact with the outside world. No, the way we live in the world matters too, and we also have a responsibility to witness to unbelievers. Our job, like the Colossians, is yes to distance ourselves from false teachers, but that shouldn't cause us to distance ourselves from unbelievers entirely. Instead, we should also be reaching out to them and seeking to win them to Christ.

So do you have relationships with unbelievers, or does your social circle consist entirely of other Christians? If you have relationships with unbelievers, are you aware of how you conduct yourself when you're in their presence, and the effect that has on their view of the gospel? Let this be an encouragement to us to seek to win the lost, and to be conscious of how we live in an unbelieving world.

II.B. How to Live

This leads us to Paul's instructions on how to live. How should we live towards outsiders? As with prayer, Paul provides three characteristics of conduct, three ways we should live, in vv. 5-6.

First, our conduct should be wise. v. 5 – “walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” This means that our conduct should be governed by Biblical wisdom. This wisdom will enable us to determine how to conduct ourselves in any given situation in a way that is winsome towards others and pleasing to God. There may not be a specific Bible verse that speaks to every particular situation we find ourselves in, but wisdom will enable us to navigate those situations in a way that is aligned with Biblical principles. Not everything is black-and-white, even in our interactions with unbelievers. And wisdom helps us navigate the grey, to discern what things are better or worse even if they're not necessarily strictly right or wrong. It could be navigating friendships with unbelievers who openly live in ways that are contrary to God's Word, or figuring out how to confront a neighbor about a persistent issue. Where do we find this wisdom? How can we become more wise? Paul says this explicitly: in Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Christ is the source of our wisdom. His life is an example of walking in wisdom. He knew how to deal with everyone from religious leaders and Pharisees to ordinary folk. He acted in perfect righteousness in every situation. So as we immerse ourselves in His Word and His teaching, through His own ministry and through His apostles’ ministry, and as we learn from His example, we ourselves can grow in wisdom. And we will be able to better apply the commands and principles of God’s Word to our specific situations and live wisely towards outsiders. Our wise conduct should be something that adorns the gospel, that causes unbelievers to be interested and curious about the way we live our lives, with the hope that they will probe deeper into the reason and motivation behind it, which is Christ. There should be something attractive and winsome in the way we live, at home and at work, so that unbelievers notice us and say: “I want to be a friend or neighbor like that.” And the hope is that that interest deepens into: “I want to know the God of someone who is a friend or neighbor like that.” So how wisely do you live in the midst of unbelievers, or does your life look no different from them? How well do you apply Biblical commands and principles, and the example of Christ, to navigate different situations? Do others notice the distinct way that you live? Let this be an encouragement for us to, as James tells us, ask the Lord for wisdom, for He gives it generously.

Second, our conduct should not only be wise, it should also be purposeful. v. 5 – “walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.” Paul exhorts us here to take advantage of every opportunity. The phrase “making the best use of the time” is literally rendered: “buying up the time.” The idea is to see time as something that is in short supply, so we should take advantage to buy up as much of it as possible. The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:16 says to “redeem the time.” Think of redeeming coupons or promotional discounts, which sometimes come with the words “while supplies last!” If you don’t redeem them within the limited timeframe, then they’re gone. The coupon, the discount, the opportunity is past. So we should live purposefully, not letting opportunities slip by but instead taking advantage of them. In context, this means that we should take advantage of every opportunity to live wisely in the sight of our unbelieving neighbors. And that is not unlike ministers of the gospel taking advantage of opportunities to proclaim the gospel clearly, as we saw in vv. 3-4. We should be mindful of our conduct and make sure to live righteously and winsomely as opportunities arise. This can mean, on holidays, deliberately showing hospitality to unbelieving friends and neighbors by inviting them over. It can mean purposefully helping out a colleague with some problem at work, even if it’s not your direct responsibility. These are all particular opportunities for us to adorn the gospel with our conduct, and we should be ready to take advantage of those opportunities and not let them pass us by. Most importantly, if our *adorning of the gospel* piques their *interest in the gospel*, we should take advantage of every opportunity to share that gospel. I know of many of you who do this, who have earned a hearing with unbelieving family and coworkers, and shared the gospel with them, passed them a tract or a Bible. That is what Paul has in mind here! So let this encourage us to continue living purposefully amidst an unbelieving world.

So our conduct should be wise; it should be purposeful; and thirdly, it should be gracious. In particular, our speech should be gracious. v. 6 – “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” By mentioning speech as a part of a believer’s general life and conduct, Paul

shows us that we need to be mindful of both our actions and our words, what we do and what we say. As he says in Colossians 3:17 – “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.” We are to glorify God in both these aspects of our lives as we live among unbelievers. In particular, Paul specifies that our speech should be gracious. This means that our speech should give grace to others. It should build others up rather than tear others down. It should edify and benefit others rather than harm or take away. It should be pleasant and winsome rather than harsh and offensive. This doesn’t mean we say positive things all the time in a way that tickles peoples’ ears and tells them exactly what they want to hear. No, there is a need sometimes to speak firmly and forcefully against others, and that can be appropriate. But we should do so without hate or disdain towards them, but instead with tact and respect.

The image of salt that Paul supplies highlights what it means for our speech to be gracious. Salt is a preservative. It works in opposition to the natural decay and rot from bacteria that a food experiences. Cured meats like bacon or prosciutto, for example, have a much longer shelf life than uncured meats like fresh pork or chicken. In a similar way, our speech should work in a positive direction that benefits and builds up rather than contribute to rot or decay. Salt also adds taste to food. In a similar way, our speech should be pleasant and tasteful, appealing and respectful to those who hear it. This type of gracious speech should, like our conduct, adorn the gospel, so that unbelievers who talk to us will be interested not just in how we talk, but the reason why we talk the way we do.

Paul actually assumes that unbelievers who hear us will be asking questions about our faith. He says: “so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Of course, the way we should answer their questions should itself be gracious as well. As we communicate the reasons for our faith and the gospel message itself, we should aim to do so in a way that expresses a genuine desire for their salvation and a hope that they would put their faith in Christ, rather than from a place of pride or superiority. This idea is expressed also in 1 Peter 3. In the immediate context of v. 15, Peter instructs Christians also on the topic of speech, not repay unbelievers reviling speech with their own reviling speech, but instead to respond with blessing. Then in v.15 he says – “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; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” He, like Paul, assumes that when unbelievers see our response, especially our speech, they will ask for a reason for the hope that is in us, and we should be prepared to answer them, with gentleness and respect. So, how do you speak to unbelievers? Do you seek to build them up or tear them down with your words? Does your speech adorn the gospel? Let’s heed Paul’s exhortation to gracious speech as we seek to be witnesses to the unbelieving world.

II.C. By What Power We Live

So we’ve considered who we are to live for, outsiders, unbelievers. And we’ve considered how we are to live, that our conduct should be wise, purposeful, and with gracious speech. We turn now to consider by what power we live.

Where can we turn to find the strength to walk worthy of our calling? Who or what empowers us to be able to live rightly? The answer is God. We don’t see this directly in our passage today, but perhaps we see it indirectly. We’ve seen that Paul

assumes that we will be praying for ourselves and our own lives of heavenly-mindedness, which includes our conduct among unbelievers that he is instructing here. And we've also seen that God is the power behind prayer, answering our prayers and making our prayers effective. What that means, then, is God is the one who gives us power to live heavenly-minded lives among unbelievers.

In fact, though we are at the end of the body of the letter, we are reminded of this same truth in Paul's prayer that opens this letter. Colossians 1:9-11 – "we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: ... being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy." Paul prays that the Colossians would walk, would live, in a manner worthy of God. He prays that this walk would be wise, flowing from the wisdom of Christ with which they are filled. And he prays that in their walk they would be strengthened by the glorious might of God, that they might endure in their walk with joy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the life that God calls us to in prayer and conduct is not an easy one. It is a life where we pray for ourselves and our lives of heavenly-mindedness, as well as for pastors and other gospel ministers, that they might faithfully proclaim the Christ from all the Scriptures. It is a life of steadfast prayer, watchful prayer, and thankful prayer. God calls us to a life not just of prayer but of conduct in view of unbelievers around us. A life with wise and purposeful conduct accompanied by gracious speech, so that unbelievers might inquire about our life of faith, and we might answer and share Christ with them.

It can be hard sometimes to live worthy of this calling, because of our own sin. In our Christian walk we can sometimes find ourselves taking one step forward, two steps back. When we find ourselves in those situations, we must restart where Paul starts in this letter, with the glory and supremacy of Christ.

Think again to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus told His disciples to watch and pray. While his disciples drifted off to sleep three times, Jesus, remained steadfast in prayer, wrestling with His Father about His sacrifice to come. He did not let the hardest trial deter or discourage Him from prayer. Rather, He let it lead Him to pray with such *watchful intensity* and undistracted focus that He sweat drops of blood, and through His prayer ultimately resigned Himself to His Father's will, *thankful* that His prayers were always heard (cf. John 11:41-42). Then He turned to His betrayer, was arrested, tried, and led to His execution. Yet even in the midst of His suffering at the hands of unbelievers, even as He was unjustly tried, spit on and struck by Jewish religious leaders, even as He was mocked, humiliated and beaten by Roman soldiers, even as He was taunted by not only the crowds but also the criminals crucified right beside Him, even in midst of all that suffering, He uttered what are perhaps the most *gracious words* ever recorded in Scripture: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). To those outsiders, those unbelievers, even His very enemies who tortured Him and nailed Him to that cross, His words had no hate, no disdain, but only compassion, mercy, and limitless *grace*. And then He gave up His own life to the Father, the final, deliberate, *purposeful* act, sacrificing His life for all who would believe in Him, in accordance with the *wisdom*

of His Father's will. In word and deed, in speech and conduct, He didn't just adorn the gospel to unbelievers; He *was and is* the gospel to unbelievers. He is our true Passover lamb sacrificed for us, whose blood painted the wooden beams of the cross, so that all who believe in Him might pass from death into everlasting life.

For those of you who are not yet Christian, perhaps you have seen and heard the words and actions of Christians in your life that look different, that intrigue you. Perhaps a Christian in your life has taken the opportunity to invite you here today. Let me encourage and invite you to put your faith in Christ today. There is no place where you can find full forgiveness of your sins and reconciliation with God. There is no other faith or philosophy or religious practice, nothing in this world that can offer the fullness that is found in Christ. So trust in Him today. Look more into the life of Jesus, and you will find Him to be a perfect Savior. There was an unbelieving Roman centurion, an outsider, who was stationed near the cross where Jesus hung, and saw and heard all that He said and did leading up to and on the cross. The weight of this testimony was so strong that he could not help but confess: "Truly this was the Son of God!" May this be your confession also.

For those of us who have put our faith in Christ, this is where we must come back again and again. Jesus is our all-sufficient Savior, who will forgive all our sins and failings, all the ways we have failed to pray as we ought and live as we ought, because of His perfect prayers and His perfect life on our behalf. Come to Him with faith. He will cleanse you afresh. Then go, continue to live according to His perfect example, and continue to pray in His name, being filled with all His fullness, drawing not upon our own strength, but upon the transforming power that only God supplies.

Let's pray...