



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“Making the Best Use of Your Time, Part 2” Colossians 4:2–6

Let’s take our Bibles again this evening and be turning again to the book of Colossians, Colossians chapter 4. That’s where we started this morning, and we want to take another look at this wonderfully rich and very practical passage; namely, verses 2 through 6 of Colossians chapter 4. Paul writes under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, beginning in verse 2:

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

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

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer once again.

Our gracious God, we come before You this evening, hungering yet again for the truth of Your Word. We pray now and beseech You that Your Holy Spirit might give fresh insight to these wonderful words of life. Lord, we pray that You would empower the preacher to preach with conviction, to preach with certainty, to preach with authority, and we pray that You would use Your Word to reach into the hearts of Your people to make us bold evangelists for You, bold proclaimers of the gospel in the world that You’ve placed us. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

I’ve entitled these two messages “Making the Best Use of Your Time.” That, of course, is taken from the latter part of verse 5 where Paul tells us to make the best use of the time. Another translation reads that we are to redeem the time. This morning I mentioned a sermon that Jonathan Edwards preached in which he listed four reasons why time is precious. The title of that sermon was “The Preciousness of Time and the Importance of Redeeming It.” The first reason Edwards gave was that time is precious because eternity depends upon it, and here is one excerpt from that sermon. Edwards says, “Time is so exceedingly precious because by it, we have opportunity of escaping everlasting misery, and of obtaining everlasting blessedness and glory.” That really answers the why of why time is important. What we do now, how we use our time affects eternity itself. Secondly, Edwards said that time is precious because it is very short. He says this, and I quote: “Time is so short, [in fact], and the work which we have to do in it is so great, that we have none of it to spare. The work which we have to do to prepare for eternity must be done in time, or it never can be done.”

Time is the most valuable of all resources, and Edwards’ point is that it is also the scarcest of all resources, so we need to work hard to redeem the time. Third, Edwards says that time is precious because we do not know how much we have. Edwards speaks in this sermon about the fact that our lives are brief. We don’t know how brief our own life will be, but we know that all of life is but a vapor. Edwards says, “We are every day uncertain whether that day will not be the last, or whether we are to have the whole day,” so we are to be productive with our time. And then, fourth, Edward says that time is precious because once it is gone, it is gone. He says and I quote: “A man can lose his entire fortune, yet in the course of only a few years, make back what he has lost. Not so with time. When time is gone, it is truly gone.”

How do we make the best use of our time? Now, what we’re speaking about is not so much what we might refer to as personal time management but rather kingdom time management because here in verses 2 through 6, the apostle Paul essentially is helping us see how we can use our time wisely in the times that we live in, and he does that by providing three responsibilities of kingdom time management. This is not about your personal schedule. This is not so much about your personal calendar. It is about the bigger picture of your role in your life and in your context and in your circumstances and having an impact for Christ in the relationships that God has given you. So, we ask the question, how do we best use our time in this time for the advancement of the kingdom of God?

First of all, we said the first responsibility that we must possess is a prayerful watching. We saw this in verses 2 through 4. This prayerful watching involves, first of all, a perseverance. Verse 2: *“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”* In other words, Paul, just like Jesus told the apostles in the garden to watch and pray, Paul is telling the Colossians to watch and pray, to be alert, to be persistent and persevering in our prayers because a lack of prayer shows a lack of faith in God, a lack of faith in His promises that He wants to use His people to impact the world with the gospel.

Secondly, not only perseverance but also priority should mark our prayerful watching. Verse 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,”* Paul says, *“I am in prison.”* As we noted this morning, the apostle Paul was in prison, and yet he asks all of the churches that he writes to that they might pray for him. Not that God would open the prison doors, but that God would open gospel doors for evangelism, and in fact, that is exactly what God did for Paul. If Paul had not been arrested, he would have never stood before Felix to speak about the gospel. If Paul was not arrested, he would have never stood before Herod Agrippa. If Paul was not arrested and chained to Roman soldiers, then those Roman soldiers would not have heard the gospel and taken that gospel back into Caesar’s own household so that converts were even found in Caesar’s household. And Paul writes about that to the Philippians, about how the Christians in Caesar’s household give greetings to the church at Philippi. And so, Paul is telling these Colossian believers that he wants them to pray for him that God might open gospel doors, that he might have an opportunity to declare the mystery of Christ. That is, the hope of Christ which is in you and the reality that God is calling not just Jews to Himself, as He primarily did in the Old Testament, but the mystery of Christ includes the revelation that gentiles are to be part of this plan of God, and not just some gentiles but all the nations of the world.

Matthew 28, go into all the world and preach the gospel and disciple the nations. That the Bible promises in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, from Genesis to Revelation, that at Christ’s first coming, He was inaugurated as King and He established His kingdom. And He has sent us as His disciples out into the highways and byways of life to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be Jesus Christ’s ambassadors in the world that we live in, in the time that we live in. And Paul says, “Listen, your prayerful watching must include this priority; in whatever you pray about, you must pray that God opens doors of effective service for you to walk through to advance the kingdom of God.” And then, third, Paul speaks about a certain precision, verse 4. Paul says, also pray *“that I may make it clear.”* What clear? The gospel that he’s going to preach, *“which is how I ought to speak.”* Paul was so concerned that he would be precise, using the right words at the right time to the right people. He was compelled. He wanted to sense that obligation, and he knew that if he had the churches praying for him, that he would fill the Holy Ghost pressure to be all that God called him to be as an apostle and as someone who proclaimed the gospel. And so, he says, “I want you to pray for me. You have a responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ to be about this task of a prayerful watching. In your prayers, perseverance. In your prayers, the right priority, praying for opportunities. And in your prayers, praying that I might be precise and clear and bold and direct about the gospel to the world in which I speak it.”

But that now takes us to a second important responsibility. How do we best use our time in this time for the advancement of the kingdom of God? Well, first we have a responsibility to possess a prayerful watching, but secondly, we have a responsibility to possess a purposeful walking. So, this is not merely about what we say and what we speak. This is how we live before the world. There is a purposeful walking to your life that must mark your life if you want to bring honor to God, and there’s two aspects to what it means to walk purposefully. First of all, Paul tells us that we are to walk wisely. Notice the beginning of verse 5. He simply says, *“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.”* Now, the word *walk* is simply a metaphor used throughout the Bible to refer to our daily conduct in the world as Christians, and this includes but is not limited to this walking in wisdom. Our conduct in living wisely includes, first of all, walking in obedience to God’s Word. Consider Deuteronomy 10:12–13: *“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord.”* If we want to walk wisely in the world, we will walk in obedience to God’s Word. Secondly, we will walk in perseverance during trials. You’re all familiar with Psalm 23: *“He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* Walking wisely in the world, third, means that we are walking in penitence; that is, turning away from worldly idols. The book of Isaiah addresses this in chapter 30. Isaiah says:

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, “Be gone!”

This is walking penitently, turning away from worldly lusts and worldly idols. The world is watching you, and they’re watching to see if your life and what you say matches up with the way that you live. Fourth, we could say that walking in wisdom means walking with patience in God’s

providence over the world. Isaiah 40:31: *“But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”* That is God’s promise to His people. Do you believe that? Do you have the patience in God’s providence over this world? Are you always ringing your hands and complaining even to nonbelievers about how bad the world is? That’s not walking in wisdom. Fifth, we could say that walking in wisdom is walking in deference or humility toward others. Micah 6:8: *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD [God] require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* That’s what it means to walk wisely, the Bible says.

Sixth, we could say that walking wisely means walking with a conscience that is clean from doing wrong, going to bed at night with a clean conscience. Ephesians 5:8: *“For at one time you were darkness,”* Paul says, *“but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”* So, a walk in wisdom when you look at the Bible means a whole lot. It means that you’re walking in obedience to His Word. It means that you’re walking in perseverance during trials. It means that you’re walking in penitence, turning away from idols. It means that you’re walking in patience regarding God’s providence over the world. It means that you’re walking in deference or humility toward others, and seventh, it means walking with confidence in God’s truth. Second Corinthians 5:7: *“For we walk by,”* what? *“Faith, [and] not by sight.”* This and more, and that’s just scratching the surface, is what it means when Paul says in verse 5 to *“walk in wisdom.”* Walking in wisdom—let me put it to you simply—simply means not doing something or saying something that would make it difficult for you to share the gospel when the opportunity arises. In fact, in the sister passage to this passage, Ephesians 5:16, Paul says that we are to watch our walk, *“not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”* It is God’s will for you to walk wisely because a *“walk in wisdom”* gives credibility to what you say about Christ, and the world is watching. Therefore, we could say the reverse of walking wisely is walking foolishly. For example, living legalistically. That is something that the world is not going to be drawn to. In fact, Paul told the Galatians, *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”* But yet you’re so foolish. *“Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”* The world is not turned onto the gospel when you have a *“holier than thou”* attitude toward other people created in the image of God. That is to walk foolishly, to live legalistically.

What about living selfishly? That also turns the world off from your witness. James 3:16: *“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be [division] and every vile practice.”* So, to live wisely means that we honor God with what we say and how we live. The opposite is to live foolishly, to live legalistically, to live selfishly, or maybe even to live worldly. First John 2:15:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

One of the things that mars the testimonies of Christians above all else is a life that doesn’t match up to the words they say they believe, a life that says they believe in Christ, but they don’t walk

like Christ, they don't talk like Christ, they don't live like Christ. And so, Paul is saying “You must walk wisely. You must have purpose to your walk.” Now, we can break this down even more. Walking wisely means how we view our life and how we live. How we conduct ourselves means that it will involve us revering God's own wisdom. Proverbs 9:10: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”* We walk wisely when we are revering God's wisdom. We walk wisely when we are deferring to God's wisdom, particularly if we're going through a trial. James says in James 1:5, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”* That's a wise way to live—not to complain to others about your circumstances, certainly not to unbelievers. That's a bad testimony. We are to revere God's wisdom and defer to God's wisdom.

We're also to listen to God's wisdom and worship God for His wisdom. Colossians 1:28: *“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”* Paul says in Colossians 3:16: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”* We need to be under the instruction of the Word of God. We need to hear other people tell us what God's Word says to keep our lives on the straight and narrow. That's why Lord's Day worship is so extremely important. But there's another aspect to walking in wisdom. We are to have a purposeful walking which means we are to walk wisely, but how will our walk in wisdom be done, not only before God, but before the watching world? Well, notice the rest of verse 5. Paul says, *“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.”* *“Toward outsiders.”* Every detail of our lives, we know, is to be *coram deo*; that is, living before the face of God. But whether you like it or not, you are also living before the face of the world. The Bible says that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. But man does look on the outward appearance, and what Paul is saying here in verse 5 is that there are outsiders who are watching your life, watching the way you live, watching the way you go to work, watching the way you raise your kids, watching the way you pay your bills, watching maybe the way you clean your house and mow your grass and keep your word. The whole world is watching. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul says this in verse 10, he says,

For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

The Bible is clear about the fact that we should care about what the world thinks when they look at us. In fact, when Paul gives qualifications for elders, he says overseers or elders, in 1 Timothy 3:7: *“Moreover, he [that is an elder] must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”* What horrible testimony would it be for a businessman or someone else who works in the world who has a horrible reputation with unbelievers to be a leader in the local church. Paul says that automatically disqualifies him from office, regardless of what his other gifts may be. And what must be true of elders obviously ought to be true of all of God's people—not just men, but women—all of God's people.

Now, what exactly or who exactly was Paul speaking about when he spoke about outsiders? Well, to a Jew, a non-Jew was considered an outsider, and Paul is a Jew, so he's adopting that same sort

of phraseology, and he’s saying to every Christian, a non-Christian is an outsider. I don’t know if you thought about it that way, but in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul says something that’s helpful in verse 11. He says, “*I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*” And then Paul says, “*For what have I to do with judging outsiders?*” That is unbelievers, those outside of the church. “*Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.*” But you are to judge the inside. “*Purge the evil person from among you.*” Paul’s speaking about the church courts and disciplining those who are in the church outside of the church, to place them with other outsiders because they’re acting like an outsider.

Jesus used this sort of language. Jesus said that His true followers were insiders. We were going through the Gospel of Mark. Do you remember in Mark chapter 4 Jesus said: “*To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that ‘they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.’*” Jesus was making a clear distinction between those who were inside the church, those who were insiders of the people of God, and those who were outsiders. So, generally speaking, when Paul says in verse 5 “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders,*” he’s generally speaking about any non-Christian, but he might also be speaking about a nominal Christian, and he also is probably speaking specifically about those outside the church that like to persecute those within the church because, remember, Paul is in prison as he writes this. He was arrested for preaching the gospel, and in the first century, many outside of the church accused those inside the church of being atheists because they didn’t bow down to idols. They accused Christians of being unpatriotic because they didn’t burn incense in the name of the emperor. They accused Christians of being immoral because the church met behind closed doors because they had to for their own protection.

And so, with all of this slander, Paul knew the best way to counter such slander against those inside the church from those outside the church was to lead a life of integrity. “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.*” You see, we are spiritual insiders because our lives, Colossians 3:3 are “*hidden with Christ in God.*” However, as Christians, we must never have a sanctified superiority complex. Instead, what Paul is getting at is that we ought to seek to bring those outsiders into the inside. Now, Paul initiates this brief discussion about being a ministry to outsiders by walking wisely because of this, and I’m going to quote someone else. “These Christians in Colossae had become so preoccupied with what was going on in the church that they had simply forgotten that the drama of their life was being played out before an audience of outsiders in the watching world.” And we spoke this morning about the syncretistic practices of Jewish ceremonialism and early Gnosticism where these congregants were so focused upon their personal walk with God, this mysticism and asceticism and worship of angels and treating the body severely, and basically worshipping the Sabbath instead of worshipping God, having such a strict understanding of the Sabbath, they were going back to the old covenant instead of understanding it rightly according to New Testament Scriptures. And all the while, they were falling into sexual immorality, and the watching world was aghast at these Christians.

No wonder they were being accused of all of these things. It’s been my pastoral opinion for some time that many Christians are so self-absorbed in their own lives, they never give due consideration about what unbelievers think about how they live their lives; and yet on the other extreme, there

are well-meaning Christians who have a zeal for the gospel, but they’re unwise in how they present the gospel before the world. We need to remember that not all Christians are called to be preachers, and I see this all the time. For example, how many Christians bravely take a stand on an issue, maybe rashly or unwisely, say in the workplace, and then they’re on the receiving end of slander or jokes, and their influence in the workplace is rendered useless because their testimony has been marred because of a harsh spirit or an unwise way in which they’re dealing with unbelievers. At your job, you weren’t hired to be the office evangelist. You are called to be exemplary in your work, always working with integrity, never hiding the fact that you’re a Christian, but seeking to influence others because they are drawn to the way you live your life. I’ve counseled many people who have come to me with issues about how this person hates them because they’re a Christian, and this person doesn’t want to be around them because they’re a Christian, maybe a friend or a neighbor or a family member or a coworker. And it’s like at the end of the counselling session, I just want to say, “But you’re not being persecuted. You have a martyr’s complex. Are you asking to get fired? Are you just looking for trouble?” Paul says you need to think about the way that you live your life because those on the outside are watching.

Not everyone’s called into full-time ministry. This is as we walk, as we live life before others. We seek to do it in a wise way to the watching world. Colossians 1:28 says that the source of the believer’s wisdom is Christ. We are in union with Christ. That is a glorious doctrine. We share the wisdom of Christ because we are in Christ, and look at the life of Christ. Look at all the opportunities our Lord had when He walked this earth that He capitalized on. Look at the grace that He showed to the Samaritan woman at the well and how He capitalized on the opportunity that He wanted a drink of water, and then He turned to her and said, “I am the living water.” Or when Jesus graciously and sympathetically fed the multitudes, and then He turned around and said, “I am the bread that is come down from heaven.” In fact, Luke 4:22 says that all the people spoke well of Jesus and they *“marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.”* Jesus knew what it meant to walk with wisdom. He is wisdom incarnate.

But a purposeful walking for a believer means not only walking wisely, it also means walking urgently. Notice the rest of verse 5. *“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders,”* Paul says, and now notice this: *“Making,”* Paul says, *“the best use of the time.”* That’s where I get the title of this series. This phrase, *“Making the best use of the time,”* really adds balance to what Paul says at the beginning of verse 5, *“Walk in wisdom.”* It could be translated “buy up the opportunity,” or you may be familiar with “redeem the time.” The verb here literally means “to buy back,” and it is a verb in the Greek that is subordinate to that phrase *“Walk in wisdom,”* so that Paul is continuing to describe how we walk wisely. How do we walk wisely? Here’s how we do it; by making the best use of our time. Paul is saying, “Don’t just sit there and wait for an opportunity to fall in your lap. Go after it, buy it up, avail yourselves.” As the great commentator who is Reformed, William Hendriksen, says, “Avail yourselves of every opportunity to be a blessing to others.” Exhaust yourself, invest yourself, in the lives of others.

It might be appropriate at this point to insert Galatians 6 into the discussion. Turn back with me to Galatians 6. Paul spoke about this more than we might want to think. Galatians 6:9, Paul says: *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good,”* underline this, *“to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* In other words, you have a primary duty to *“the household of*

faith.” Those are the insiders. Those are those with whom their lives are “*hidden with Christ*” and your life is with them, but don’t gloss over the fact that Paul says in verse 10, “*As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.*” We aren’t to be prejudiced. We aren’t to be biased. So positively, when Paul says in verse 5, “*Make the best use of your time,*” positively, he means buy up your time. Make the most of it. Negatively, he means; therefore, stop wasting your time. In fact, in the sister passage of this—I keep referring to it—Ephesians 5, almost verbatim, verse 16, it’s more in the negative: “*Making the best use of the time,*” Paul says, “*because the days are evil.*” There’s an urgency to that. In other words, Paul is saying, “Don’t surrender your time to the Evil One. Instead, buy your time up, use it for God, use your energy for God and for His glory and for His kingdom.” So, when Paul says here, “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time,*” there is a sense of urgency to this.

The Old Testament passage that would be parallel to this is a verse that I read at every single funeral I conduct. You’re familiar with it. Psalm 90:12: “*So teach us to number our days,*” says the psalmist, “*that we may get,*” what? “*a heart of wisdom.*” Life is short, and so we should make the use of any and every opportunity to advance God’s kingdom, to seek to Christianize the world around us, to capitalize on those opportunities to be of service to God in the world—not just in the church. We aren’t merely to serve within the church. We come here once a week. We are to go out into the world and be of service in the world, not to churchify the world, but to Christianize the world.

In fact, Paul is saying far more than we might think. Colossians 4:5: “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*” If we’re not careful, we can make that sound like a Max Lucado slogan, or teaching that comes from *Chicken Soup for the Soul*: “This is just about personal time management. This is about you being the best you, using your talents the best you can so that you can be satisfied.” Oh, no. As a matter of fact, notice the verse again. “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of,*” notice this, “*the time.*” There’s a definite article there. This is a specific time that he’s speaking about. What is the time Paul is speaking about? Well, he’s speaking, my friends, about the era of gospel harvest, the unique period in human history in which you and I live, the period between Christ’s first coming and His second coming. What does Jesus say in Matthew 21? “*Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you,*” speaking to Jewish people, “*and given to a people producing its fruits.*” If you want a little bit more insight on that, turn with me to Matthew 9:35. We’re all familiar with this. “*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.*” And notice it says He’s “*healing every disease and every affliction.*” Our investment in the kingdom of God is not merely about proclaiming the gospel.

Look at the Bible. What did Jesus do? He was concerned about those with diseases. He was concerned about those that were afflicted. He had sympathy, and verse 36: “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples.*” And this is what you are familiar with. Jesus says, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*” We live in a unique and unprecedented time in history. If Colossians 3:17, “*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,*” applied to any time in the world, it applies now for Christians. All of Christ for all of life, investing your time and your energy in other people, to have an opportunity to proclaim the gospel,

to have an opportunity and a platform to speak forth the glories of Christ. Now, let me just tell you, relationships take time, so get ready. The more people you know, the less time you will have, but remember Paul’s prayer. He began by saying, “Colossians, I want you to pray for me that God would open doors in my circumstances, as I’m in the capital city being persecuted,” but now he’s calling on the Colossian Christians to also walk like he is, wisely and urgently, searching, praying for, capitalizing on any opportunity you have to be a witness for Christ. Perhaps Paul’s words to the Corinthians might be helpful. You don’t have to turn there. You’re familiar with it. Paul said:

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So [Paul says] I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

What is Paul speaking about? He’s speaking about Colossians 4:5: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.” He’s speaking about this purposeful walking before God and before man, with the gospel on our lips, investing our time and our energy and our resources in the kingdom of God—not just the church but the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God. But finally, Paul turns to what this looks like. It’s not just a walk of wisdom; it also includes our talk. So, Paul has given so far two responsibilities we have to advance the kingdom of God, and the best use of our time for this time. Number one, it will involve a prayerful watching. Number two, it will involve a purposeful walking. And now he gets to the bottom of it. Number three, this will involve a powerful witnessing. Verse 6: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Now, the substance of the gospel message Paul doesn’t deal with here because he already dealt with that in chapters 1 and 2. If you remember, chapters 1 and 2 are some of the most glorious and doctrinally deep verses in all of the Bible, some of my favorite. He doesn’t deal with the substance of the gospel. Here, he deals with the method of evangelism. He deals here in verse 6 with the idea of how we interact with the lost, and I love the way that Paul does this. This interaction that we have with the lost Paul breaks down into a certain flavor of truth that we are to leave with others. In your witnessing, when you actually open your mouth and interact with unbelievers, what should it look like? Well, you should leave a certain flavor, a gospel flavor, and what will that involve? Well, there are three aspects to this gospel flavor.

First of all, Paul speaks about what I want to call a savory flavor, a savory flavor. Verse 6, the beginning, Paul says “Let your speech always be gracious.” Let it always be gracious. Earlier in chapter three and verse 8, he said, “You must put” all these sins away: “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.” He says in verse 9: “Do not lie to one another”—we use our mouths to do that—“seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.” He says in verse 16 we are to “let the word of Christ dwell” richly in us because when it richly dwells in us, it comes out of us, right? He’s telling us that our speech—what we say, how we say it—matters greatly. And we need to say what we say with a sense of graciousness. In Paul’s day, so-called gracious speech was spoken about by non-Christians as witty or clever remarks, but that is not what Paul has in mind. This is something much deeper. Paul is not talking about, “Well, you

need to be a good conversationalist.” No, Paul is taking a common expression in his day and infusing it with Christian meaning. In other words, Paul Christianizes the word *gracious* to mean “speech that rivets and captivates the listener.”

And let me ask you a question: What will rivet and captivate an unbeliever more than telling him they are a sinner heading to hell? What will rivet and captivate an unbeliever more than saying, “But here is the good news. Jesus Christ died on the cross for the ungodly, and if you place faith in Him and repent of your sins, you can have eternal life.” That happens when the quickening work of the Holy Spirit is operative. Your gospel words of truth become gracious like a balm to the soul. Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, we are to “*speak the truth in love,*” right? Gracious speech deals with the love portion of speaking the truth in love. It’s speaking about our tone. What does it mean to speak graciously? It means that we’re not arrogant. It means that we’re not overly harsh. It means that we’re not patronizing to unbelievers.

Here’s a rule of thumb. Let the words of Scripture offend anyone at any time, but don’t let the person relaying those words be offensive. Sometimes it’s unavoidable. Paul said in Romans 12:18: “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*” And when you’re preaching the gospel, you’re preaching with authority, and you have to speak with an authoritative voice because this is the very Word of God. But most people are not preachers, and so in your personal dialogue, there must be a sense in which you are conveying grace to the listener; that they are walking away from your conversation with them about the gospel with a sense of awe because, like Christ, Luke 4:22, your words were graciously speaking to them. In fact, Psalm 45:2 says that a king is powerful and influential because of his ability to demonstrate gracious speech. Psalm 45:2 says, “*Grace is poured upon your lips;*” speaking about the king, “*therefore God has blessed you forever.*” To have gracious speech means—let me borrow the language of Ephesians 4:29—it means that our words “*minister grace unto the hearers.*” Or it means that we speak that which is appropriate to the situation; or it means that we speak that which is true but coupled with gentleness, such as what Proverbs 15:1 says, “*A soft answer turns away,*” what? “*wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*”

There is a certain wisdom in the way we speak to unbelievers that we aren’t just to say whatever we want to say however we want to say it. Some people wrongly think that the angrier you are when you give the gospel, the more holy you are. No, you’re unholy when you’re that way. That wasn’t the way Jesus was. In fact, in 2 Timothy 2, Paul tells Timothy that the Lord’s servant—that’s any pastor or elder, anyone who is a voice for God—“*The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able [also] to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness,*” because “*God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.*” And Paul says, “*And they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*” Paul says anyone who is a leader in the church must have the ability to be gentle and gracious and kind even to unbelievers, and especially to unbelievers, that they may actually hear what you are telling them. And in principle, that applies to all believers. We’re not to be quarrelsome, or we’re not to look to win an argument or to pick a fight, but our powerful witnessing is effective not only when we leave a savory flavor, gracious speech, but secondly, we must leave a salty flavor.

Go back to Colossians 4:6. Paul says, “*Let your speech always be gracious.*” That’s the savory flavor, but then he says, it also must be “*seasoned with salt.*” Now, if the love side of speaking

gracious speech is speaking with gracious words, then the truth side is what Paul’s speaking about here when he says that our speech needs to be “*seasoned with salt.*” This simply means that within the context of gospel witnessing, in all of our gentleness and all of our graciousness, in all of our desire to not be unnecessarily harsh, we must never, and I mean never, at the high cost of compromising truth be too loving and too gentle. In this sense, therefore, our speech must not merely be savory, but it must also be salty. If the salt of the truth doesn’t win them—listen—then nothing will, so there is no compromise. The gospel is not optional. The gospel is not irrelevant. We must be very clear about the truth of the gospel. We cannot compromise it with soft words.

So, the salt of our speech, Paul is saying, is the seasoning that gives our words of witness the necessary flavor and edginess of gospel realities. Listen, we are never to be guilty of making the gospel boring or bland or seem weak and puny and powerless. Rather, our gospel presentation must have a strong and seasoned taste that make the hard truths about the gospel, such as you are a sinner, very clear. And those truly elect will like the salty taste of the gospel, won’t they? Because ultimately, it’s not up to us; it’s up to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus the wind blows where it wants to blow, and the Spirit is like the wind. It is independent. So, having speech that is seasoned with salt means speech that gives a refreshingly honest take to the unbelievers we speak to. We tell them about sin. We’re honest to them about Satan. We’re clear to them about hell and judgment.

Now, there are three interrelated ways that our speech seasoned with salt will mean for our witness. First of all, for our speech to be seasoned with salt means that, as Christians, we will have a preservative power in the world. You remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount? He gave some very clear words to the disciples. In Matthew 5:13, He says:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus says Christians are to be “*the salt of the earth.*” You know what that means? It means that God’s truth in general and the gospel specifically actually preserves the world from God’s judgment, that to the degree that you speak truth, to the degree that you live according to the Law of God is true to the degree that you are preserving God’s world from judgment. In fact, the Bible promises over and over and over again, for example Psalm 22:

*All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.*

Or Zechariah 14:9: “*And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.*” Or Isaiah 11:9 and Habakkuk 2:14, almost exactly identical: “*For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*” You see, the truth of God’s

Law is important to preserve society. It's not law or gospel; it's law and gospel. Both are important because to the degree that we uphold the Mosaic law, which is God's Law, will be to the degree that we have a society that is preserved enough to give us an opportunity to preach the gospel. That is why you should desire conservatives to be elected to office. Christians should not shy away from that. Why would we ever vote for someone that's pro-abortion, or why would we ever vote for someone who wants to go into the public schools and indoctrinate people with Critical Race Theory? Why in the world would any Christian be silent on that? To be silent is not to speak the truth. It's to not have a preserving influence on God's world, that God promises someday Jesus Christ will be King of over *“as the waters cover the sea.”* *“The knowledge of the Lord”* will be all around. So, as we speak salty, we have a preservative power in the world.

Secondly, we have a praise-worthy power. Paul may have had in mind when he speaks here about our speech being seasoned with salt, the salt that was used in Old Testament sacrifices. Leviticus 2:13 says, *“You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.”* So perhaps Paul is saying that in the same way the Old Testament sacrifices were seasoned with salt to be acceptable before God, so too when we speak the truth regardless of the response, if we speak the truth, if we speak the salt of God's Word regardless of the response, God is glorified because the truth is conveyed clearly and powerfully. And such actually becomes an act of worship where we are, Romans 12, living sacrifices before God. Though it may cost us much in this world, God in heaven is praised.

So, there is a praise-worthy power, a preservative power, but also when our speech is seasoned with salt, there's a penetrating power. Let me give you a principle. Proverbs 27:6: *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”* Salt can sting if rubbed into a wound, and sometimes—and should I say all the time—our gospel words of witness will sting. They will humble the sinner. That's the power of the gospel to bring the sinner low, prostrate before God, confessing their sin, being undone before the holiness of God. And the sinner may not like it, and the sinner may spit at you, but God will be glorified if you are faithful to the truth, and maybe, just maybe, the quickening power of the Holy Spirit will use your strong truthful words to wake them up from the dead. That's what the Bible says the power of the gospel does. When the Holy Spirit is operative, it raises us from our deadness in sins and trespasses. How are you going to raise a dead sinner if they don't know they're dead, if they don't know they're dead in sin? We just need to be faithful to plant the seed.

And so, our powerful witness needs to be marked by speech that has a savory flavor. It's gracious, a salty flavor, but finally, a specific flavor. Notice the end of verse 6. Paul says, you're doing all this, you're speaking this way in your witnessing so that, purpose clause, *“you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* That goes back to the passage I read earlier from the apostle Peter where he speaks in chapter 3 of his first epistle, *“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”* *“[To] know how you ought to answer each person”* means simply speaking the right words at the right time to the right person, full of truth, full of love, but also understanding that timing is everything. And if you've been married for any length of time, you know that timing is everything. You better not bring up the wrong thing at the wrong time lest there be an adverse effect. And so, Paul is saying, “Look, if you speak graciously, if you speak truthfully, you're going to know how to answer each person. You're going to know how to

deal with any person you come in contact with to give them the gospel. You’re going to know the right time and the right words to say at the right time.” And the Holy Spirit, because we believe in the doctrine of election and predestination, is faithful to call His sheep into the fold.

So, in summary, let me put it to you this way. When character and conduct and conversation are all working together, it makes for a powerful witness for the gospel, and that’s what Paul is discussing here. He comes to the end of this letter, and he says, “Look, you know the glories of the doctrine of union with Christ, but you’re having difficulty applying it in the world God has placed you.” And he’s saying, “Look, until you see all of life, every second of your life through the lens of the fact that you must redeem the time, you’ll never be effective for the kingdom of God.” So you say to yourself, “Where do I begin?” Well, you begin where you are. Notice the ordering of how Paul lays this out. I mentioned it this morning. First, Paul says that the doctrine of union with Christ affects, first of all, our relationships within the church. Secondly, it affects our relationships that are most immediate to us—in our family, our wives and our children, speaking the truth of the gospel to our wives, being a man of the home, raising our children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. Start there. And then it extends into the workplace where slaves are submissive to their masters or employees are submission to their employers. And then it extends to the outside world, those that are outside of the church.

You begin where you are now. You begin in taking the small steps in being faithful to who God has placed before you—your neighbor, your friends, your associates at work. I remember several years ago I attended a graduation service, which I’ve done from time to time, depending upon which church I have pastored. In this particular year, there were several kids graduating from high school, and the theme of the whole graduation was how these young people can be a world changer, and they had music about being a world changer. You want to be a world changer? It starts where you are, being faithful with what is in front of you with the gifts God has given you, the opportunities and relationships God has set before you because we have a responsibility to be ambassadors for the kingdom of God. You’re not just an ambassador for Christ Reformed Community Church. That is but a small sliver in the humongous kingdom of God. We are called to leave the four walls of this church and to be in the world. We are called to have an impact, and how do we do that? With a prayerful watching, a purposeful walking, which will then result in powerful witnessing. May God seal these truths to our hearts, and may our hearts beat with the apostle Paul’s to do God’s will for God’s glory and for the sake of His kingdom. To Him be the glory. Let us pray.

Dear God, we thank You for these wonderful truths. Lord, we could say so much more because your Word says so much more about redeeming the time, making the best use of our time, but we pray that what we have spoken about this Lord’s Day would have some impact on those who have heard Your Word. We thank You for this church. We thank You for the integrity of this church. We thank You for the servants in this church who are faithful, not only in their spiritual gifts within the church, but outside of the church. Regularly and daily, they’re sharing the gospel with those around them. Lord, we always want to be a church that is known in the community. We always want to be known as the church that is sympathetic and gracious, never compromising on truth but desiring Your kingdom to expand in the world in the context in which we live. So, seal these truths to our hearts for Your glory and for our good, we pray in the precious name of Christ our Savior. Amen.