

Wise Gospel Speech

Colossians 4:5–6¹

Introduction

As we saw last time, Paul is writing to the church in Colosse to address several things. The particular paragraph that we are looking at addresses conversation as it relates to the Christian. On the one hand, Paul addresses speech as it relates to our conversation with God (prayer). This is *vertical* speech. On the other hand, Paul addresses how Christians are to hold conversations with their fellow human beings. This is *horizontal* speech. In each of these cases, Paul relates both speeches to the gospel. Our prayers ought to focus on petitioning God for gospel opportunities. Now, in Colossians 4:5–6 Paul addresses how our conversation with unbelievers (a direct answer to prayers for gospel opportunities) ought to reflect our desire to proclaim Christ to those we come in contact with.

We live in a world that is so fast. There is fast internet, fast vehicles, fast food, fast technology, etc. All our modern conveniences are designed to help you make the best use of your time. Why is our world so focused on making new ways to “save time?” Perhaps it is, in part, due to the fact that even unbelievers are aware of the fleeting moments we have in this life. Life is a vapor and then is gone (Jam. 4:14). Believers and unbelievers alike have only a few moments on this earth and then it is gone. You do not have much time to accomplish the Great Commission that God has given you to complete. Therefore, *you must make best use of your time as you live wisely before unbelievers, answering their questions regarding the faith in a gracious and appropriate way.*

Colossians 4:5–6 ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. ⁶ *Let* your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Wise gospel speech is characterized by—

Preview Outline:

1. **Proper Conduct (v. 5)**
2. **Proper Conversation (v. 6)**

First, wise gospel speech is to be characterized by—

1. **Proper Conduct (v. 5)**

The unbelieving world ought to see in a very visible way the change that God has wrought in you through Christ. No Christian was intended to be a hermit. We are designed by God to be relational and as a result of that desire we as believers, who have the heart of Christ for sinners, must wisely

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version.

conduct ourselves in such a way that provides the world an example of what gospel change can bring.

“*Walk in wisdom*” — This is a very interesting phrase. The word “walk” (Gr. περιπατέω) is the word the writers of the four Gospels use to describe people traveling from one place to another. Here, Paul uses it in a metaphorical sense (i.e. “as you are walking through life”). He used this same word in his letter to the church in Ephesus when he urged them to walk worthy (Eph. 4:1), walk in love (Eph. 5:2), walk in light (Eph. 5:8), and walk in wisdom (Eph 5:15). He also uses this word to urge believers to “walk honestly” (Rom. 13:13). The phrase “in wisdom” (Gr. Ἐν σοφίᾳ) essentially means “in a wise way.” Obviously, a command “to walk in a wise way” implies that you can, in fact, walk in a foolish way. Paul says as much in the parallel passage:

Ephesians 5:15–16 ¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Thus, to live as a fool is to live in the opposite way that God instructs. In other words, to walk as a fool is to disregard Scripture whereas to walk in wisdom is to walk in obedience to what God says in His Holy Word.

Biblical wisdom, then, comes from God alone—there is no other source for true wisdom:

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge, *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The wisdom that comes from God is “past finding out”:

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

Throughout the course of Colossians Paul has commented on the concept of wisdom:

Colossians 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:1–3 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:20–23 ²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—²¹ “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” ²² which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

To walk in a wise way is to walk in God’s way (Col. 2:6–7). Wisdom proceeds from God and the one who seeks it will find that God is a gracious dispenser of it. Walking in a wise way means that you are aware of the situation and point of life you are in and how you can make best use of it for the glory of God.

“*toward those who are outside*” — To whom are we to walk in wisdom before? “Those who are outside.” This is a reference to people who are outside of the faith—unbelievers. Other portions of Scripture describe unbelievers in this way:

1 Corinthians 5:12–13 ¹²For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “*put away from yourselves the evil person.*”

1 Thessalonians 4:9–12 ⁹But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; ¹¹that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, ¹²that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that you may lack nothing.*

It is interesting to note that, on the one hand, believers are to mark false teachers (Col. 2:8) and in some cases completely avoid them; yet on the other hand, believers are to be prepared to live in such a way that is clearly visible before the unbelieving world.

“*redeeming the time*” — Why are we to walk wisely before the world? Because we are called to “redeem the time.” To “redeem” is to “buy from.”² The idea is that we make most of the opportunity that we have in the short life we live. We cannot have our time back—it marches on without our permission. The world does not want to think about death; believers are wise to remember it, for all people must pass through it (Heb. 9:27). We recognize the important task before us: preach the gospel. The time for people to repent from their sins is *now*.

Paul summarized it well:

Romans 13:11–13 ¹¹And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. ¹²The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

Though the gospel can only be clearly understood through explicit, verbal communication (as I stated in a previous message), the unbelieving world can see the *result* of gospel change in the life of a Christian. Believers who walk in a wise way before the world will inevitably have people inquire as to the reason for their way of life. Every believer must be prepared to share the answer to that vital question (1 Pet. 3:15).

Not only should wise gospel speech is to be characterized by proper conduct, second, wise gospel speech should be characterized by—

2. Proper Conversation (v. 6)

This may seem obvious, but wise gospel conversation will only happen when you adorn the gospel by the way that you speak (or type, as the case may be).

“*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*” — There are two ways that your speech should be identified as: gracious and tasteful.

² Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 580.

A. *Gracious*

While the context indicates that Paul is speaking about gospel speech in particular, the general principle of gracious speech applies in all contexts. Paul argues as much in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

The words that come from the mouth of a Christian should be words that edify (i.e. build up) the hearer. This does not mean that believers completely avoid controversy; rather, believers know that gospel conversation (which is without question confrontational) builds up the hearer because he or she learns how to have a right relationship with God. Our words (whether spoken or written) should be, of all people, characterized by appropriate timeliness and kindness.

B. *Tasteful*

The phrase “seasoned with salt” has several possible meanings: (1) salt can be used as a preservative (something the readers of Paul’s day would have most certainly understood); (2) salt can provide flavor to food (tastiness); or (3) salt can be used to purify. Given the context of gospel speech, I believe Paul is referring to the tasteful conversation that believers are to have with those who are “outsiders.”

Jesus used the illustration of salt during the course of His ministry on earth:

Mark 9:50 Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”

The picture of tastiness conveys appropriateness. Believers utilize words that are tasteful and appropriate. Such words should adorn the gospel and glorify the God to Whom we will give an account of for our words.

“that you may know how you ought to answer each one” — The result of utilizing gracious and tasteful speech is that you will know how to answer “each one” (referring back to those who are outsiders). When the unbelieving world sees your gracious and tasteful speech, they are immediately drawn to reason for it. This is because the natural tendency of mankind is to *not* use gracious and tasteful speech. Our bent is toward self-righteousness and pride and that tendency reveals itself in the way that we speak. Even in Psalm 2 (which Pastor Gordon Dickson as been working through) you can see the proud speech of mankind:

Psalm 2:1–3 ¹ Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, *saying*, ³ “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”

Illustration: No illustration of this could be more obvious than social media. Without seeing people face to face (where many people would think twice before speaking the innermost thoughts of their hearts) it is easy to simply hide behind a keyboard and type whatever you want in response to someone else. Often people will write with high emotions and tasteless language. When someone who has the Spirit of God controls his or her tongue before an unbelieving world, you can bet they will take notice!

The tongue is a very powerful and dangerous instrument.

James 3:5–10 ⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Oh that we would learn to watch our speech so that we might know how to answer those who recognize the change which the gospel has wrought in us!

Conclusion

As I stated at the beginning, you must make best use of your time as you live wisely before unbelievers, answering their questions regarding the faith in a gracious and appropriate way. When we live in this intentional way, wise gospel speech will flow from our mouth because it originates in our hearts.