

T R I N I T Y  
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D A L L A S

The Sermon

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Colossians 4:2-6

"Lifestyle Evangelism"

August 13, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Okay, I want you to take your Bible and turn with me to the book of Colossians, Colossians chapter 4, and today we're in verses 2 through 6. And if you're having trouble finding Colossians, remember it this way: General Electric Power Company (GEPC) - Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, okay. So, Colossians 4. I'm going to begin reading in verse 2, and then I'll pray, and we'll look at the passage together. The title of this message is "Lifestyle Evangelism," and I think you'll see why.

Beginning in verse 2, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." This is the reading of God's word, and we want to go to Him now in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, only You can cause Your word to come alive in our hearts. Only You can shine the light of understanding into our minds. And so as we look at this passage today, I pray that You would bring it home to our hearts and to our lives, and that we would be challenged, we would be encouraged, and we would be built up. So I pray for everyone here today

that Your blessing would rest fully upon every soul here today. And I pray for myself that You will lay Your hand upon me for good. Fill me with Your Spirit, and use me as a tool, as an instrument in Your hand to expound Your word. So we look to You now, Father. May Your Son be preeminent in what we say today, in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

In these verses the apostle Paul is talking about personal evangelism, the responsibility that each and every one of us has to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. God has placed each and every one of us in different parts of the town and the surrounding area, and that's strategically done by God so that you would be a point of light where you live and where you work and where you go to school. That's by God's sovereign providence. The moment you're converted, He doesn't take us immediately to heaven. The worship's much better there, the fellowship's much better there, everything's much better there; but there's something there that we'll never be able to do there that we can do here, and that is to be a witness for Christ to unbelievers.

And so Paul is addressing this subject in these verses. And to put this in context, he has been pushing the fencepost out in chapter 3 and chapter 4 and enlarging the circle of the application. In the first two chapters of Colossians it's very doctrinal, very theological and biographical. But as we come to chapter 3 and this part of chapter 4, it's intensely practical, and the lesson that we learn is that every part of our lives must be lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 3, he began with our personal lives, and that's in the first 11 verses of chapter 3, that our heart towards God must be of a certain focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul writes, "Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth." And then as he moves the fencepost out, he goes beyond just our personal life to our church life, and in chapter 3, verses 12 through 17, he talks about how we are to interact with one another and how we are to forgive one another, and be long-suffering with one another, and how we're to sing together to the Lord.

And then he moves the fencepost out a little bit further and he addresses our home life, and in chapter 3, verses 18 through 21, he talks about how wives are to submit to their husbands, and husbands are to love their wives, and how children are to obey their parents – all of this under the lordship of Jesus Christ. And then he moves the fencepost out a little bit more and he talks about our work life, and in chapter 3, starting in verse 22, he talks about slaves and masters and how slaves are to work and how masters are to care for their slaves in a certain way; and for us the application is employer and employee.

And so now he moves the fencepost out just a little bit further. And so he's gone from our personal life to our church life, to our home life, to our work life; now to our outside life, if you will, out in the world as we intersect with the lives of unbelievers, and how we are to be a witness to them, and how we are to pray for their salvation, and how we are to pray for opportunities for us to talk to them, and how we are to live our life in a certain way before them, and how we are to speak to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. So that's what Paul is doing. He begins with the innermost concentric circle, our own life; and now we come to the section that how we're to live in the world.

So as we look at these verses, beginning in verse 2 and extending to verse 6, he tells us three things that are very important about how to be a witness for Jesus Christ, how to carry out personal evangelism. And in verses 2 through 4, he talks about prayer; and then in verse 5, a godly lifestyle; and then in verse 6, gracious words. So let's begin in verse 2, that our personal evangelism, number one, "It begins with prayer." That's the focus, beginning in verse 2. And all our efforts to reach others, it must begin with prayer. Everything begins with prayer. Prayer is not our last resort, prayer must be our first recourse, our first action.

And it's been well said that before you talk to a lost person about God, you first need to talk to God about a lost person. So we go to God first, and then we talk to others. Prayer is to pave the way. Prayer is to prepare us. Prayer is to prepare them. Prayer is to establish the circumstances and the context in which we're able to talk to them. So prayer is vitally important.

So that's why he begins in verse 2. He says, "Devote yourselves to prayer." This verb "devote" is a very strong word, and it means to continue steadfastly in prayer without giving up. The idea is to come before the throne of God and stay before the throne of God and be persevering in your prayer life, and in this context, not just in general for various needs, but specifically for those who need the Lord.

This verb "devote," as Paul wrote this, it's hard to see it in the English. But Paul wrote this in the Greek language, and I just want you to know he wrote it in the present tense, which means always be devoting yourselves to prayer, never take a day off from praying. And then it's in the active voice, which means you've got to take action for this. You can't just sit back and wait for a feeling. You just can't wait for an emergency. You need to always be taking the active step in prayer to pursue God in prayer. And it's in the imperative mood, which means this is a command. Christ is commanding us through the apostle Paul to devote yourself in prayer. And so, quite frankly, either we devote ourself in prayer, or we are disobedient. It's one of the two.

And this word for "prayer," it speaks of the intensity of the soul. It's not a casual offering up of a prayer. There is a focus, and there's an energy, and there's a fervency, and there is an intensity of wrestling with God in prayer. And so this kind of perseverance in prayer is taught throughout the New Testament. I'd like to give you just some cross-references to really establish this.

In Luke 18:1, Jesus said, "At all times men ought to pray and not lose heart." Paul writes in Ephesians 6:18, "Pray at all times." And earlier in this book in Colossians 1:3, Paul models it. He says that he's "praying always for you." And in Colossians 1:9, he says, "Since the day we heard of it," – of their conversion – "we have not ceased to pray for you." And probably the verse we're most familiar with is 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." We are to always be in a state of prayer, whether it's verbal, whether it's mental, unspoken, whether it is with others, whether we are by ourselves, whether it is a time of formal praying, whether it is a time of

informal praying as life is unfolding, we are to be continually in a state of dependence upon God in prayer.

So he then tells us how we are to devote ourselves in prayer, and specifically in this context I believe he has in mind the salvation of unconverted people. But he says in the middle of verse 2, here's how we are to devote ourselves in prayer, "keeping alert in it." "Keeping alert" means to stay awake, to keep your antenna up, to keep your eyes open, to keep your heart open for people around you and needs that are around you, especially people who need the Lord. And it is easy for us to be so caught up in what we are doing that we walk past unsaved people, or live next door to unsaved people, or work at the office next to unsaved people, and we don't notice them like we should. And so that is why Paul says, "You've got to stay alert. You've got to keep your eyes open and your heart open as you devote yourself to prayer." And in this context, the rest of these verses, he's talking about praying for the salvation of unsaved people.

And then he adds, "with an attitude of thanksgiving." God delights in answering prayers that are offered from a thankful heart; in other words, not just bringing all of our problems and just dumping them on God. Now, we are to bring our needs and to bring our issues before the Lord, but we're also to come with thanksgiving in our heart, and thanking God for what He has already done in my life, and what God is doing in my life, and what God has already provided in my life. And I think even in this context, for those people who have already come to faith in Christ – people in your family, people in your neighborhood, people that you have seen come to know the Lord. So we need to be devoting ourselves in prayer, and staying on the alert as we live our lives, an alert for people who need Christ.

So, in verse 3, he continues with this train of thought. He says, "praying," and you'll note verse 3 is just the continuation of the same sentence. So he's on the same train of thought, if you will. This is not a new thought starting in verse 3, this is just an extension of verse 2. He says, "praying at the same time for us as well." So what Paul is saying is, "While you're praying for yourself, pray for us. We have the same needs that you have. Pray for us." And we ask, "Who is the 'us'?" Well, we know the "us" is Paul who's

writing this, right, this letter, and also Timothy who's with him - we saw that in the first verse of this book. But if you'll let your eye look at verse 7 all the way down to verse 14, do you see this list of people? This is who's with Paul.

Paul at this time is not in a prison, per se, he's in a house in Rome. He's been arrested, he's waiting trial before Caesar, and he is in a house, but he's chained to Roman soldiers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He cannot get away, but people can come and go into this house. And so Paul has a full house, if you will, starting with Tychicus in verse 7, and Onesimus in verse 9, and all the way down to verse 14. Paul says, "Pray for us as well, that God will open a door for the word."

Now "a door for the word" means an opportunity to witness for Jesus Christ. This door for the word must be opened by God. It is what we call a divine appointment. It's in God's perfect timing, in God's perfect place; God orchestrates the circumstances, and suddenly a door swings open, and you have now the opportunity to share the gospel with someone in a way that you did not otherwise have that opportunity.

A couple things to note from this. Number one, only God can create these opportunities. Only God can open this door. We can't force it open, we can't make it open, that is why we have to pray, and that is why we have to ask for others to pray for us that God will open this door for the word. "The word" here refers to speaking the gospel, speaking on behalf of Christ. And so there are opportunities that only God can orchestrate and create.

And what is also interesting to me is that Paul is in a very difficult place; but he doesn't ask for prayer to get him out of prison, he asks for prayer that while he's in this prison that he will be the witness for Christ that God wants him to be. And I think this speaks volumes to all of us here today. So often, our prayers are, "God, get me out of this jam, get me out of whatever it is," when instead, we need to prioritize God right here where I am: "Help me to be the witness for Christ You would have me to be."

So if suddenly you receive bad news and you have to go to the hospital for some kind of medical treatment, your response should be, "God, help me to be a witness to the nurses, to the doctors, to the people who are in the waiting area. Help me be Your person to witness for Christ." If you have a flat tire, and somebody stops and helps you fix that flat tire, what a golden opportunity this is to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the mindset that Paul had, and it's the mindset that you and I must have as well.

And the other thing that strikes me is, if Paul has to ask for other people to pray for him in personal witnessing, then how much more so must you and I ask for others to pray for us. I mean, Paul's the greatest Christian who ever lived, arguably so; and if he is needing other people to pray for him that opportunities will prevail for him to witness for Christ, then how much more so do you and I need to pray for this, that God will give you that opportunity to talk to your boss, that God will give you that opportunity to talk to your father-in-law, that God will give you that opportunity to talk to the person who's seated next to you in school, or their office is next to you at work. We need to pray, and we need to ask for people to pray for us; and that's exactly what Paul is doing here.

And there's a reason why. He wants prayer for the door to open, and he spells it out for us in verse 3, "so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ." "God, if You'll just open this door, I'm going to speak for You. God, if You will just give me the opportunity at the right time, at the right place, to be able to talk to my work associate, to be able to talk to my boss, to be able to talk to my next door neighbor, I'm going to go through this door and I'm going to speak for Christ. You're going to help me. You're going to give me the words to say." That is what Paul is saying here.

And he calls it "the mystery of Christ." Do you see that in verse 3, "the mystery of Christ"? What's the mystery of Christ? Well, the word "mystery" refers to something that was previously hidden and unknown and could not be known, something that God has hidden. And when God hides something, you'll never find it, and you'll never know what it is. And in the Old Testament there was the mystery of Christ.

Now, Christ is taught throughout the whole Old Testament, don't misunderstand. Starting in Genesis 3:15, "The seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent." I knew once I started down that path I was going to get something mixed up. But you know what I'm saying, right? Can I get an amen? Amen. Okay, thank you. I hate to beg, I really do. I hate to beg.

So Christ is revealed in the Old Testament, no doubt about it: Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Zechariah 12 and 13. I mean, we can just keep going to passages: Isaiah 6, chapter 7, chapter 11, chapter 40, chapter 42, chapter 49, chapter 50, chapter 53, chapter 61, 63, 66. I mean, Christ is just all through the Old Testament. But there was only a partial knowledge being made known.

And when you come to the New Testament, the mystery is made known. It's like one of these dimmer switches in a dining room where you can turn up the light and it just gets brighter, and then brighter and brighter. That's the way the Bible is, it's called progressive revelation. And so by the time we come to the New Testament, what was a mystery in the Old Testament is now revealed in the New Testament.

So if Christ was revealed in the Old Testament, what aspect of this was a mystery? Well, if you'll turn back to Colossians 1:26-27, I'll show us. And so the content of this mystery is Christ Himself. But he tells us in verses 26 and 27 of Colossians 1, "The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations," that refers to the Old Testament, before the coming of Christ. And it was God Himself who hid it, and so it was a mystery.

What aspect? He goes on in verse 26, "but has now been manifested to His saints," - that's referring to New Testament believers, verse 27 - "to whom" - referring to His saints, and that would include you and me - "to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery." So, Paul, tell me specifically what is this mystery that has now been made known; and he tells us two things here at the end of verse 27.



Here's the first: "this mystery among the Gentiles." Now in the Old Testament there were Gentiles who were brought to faith in Christ, the coming of Christ. I mean, for example, Jonah, when he went to Nineveh, it was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire; and he went and he marched around the city, and he preached, "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed," and the whole city repented from the king down, and those Gentiles were brought to faith in Christ. So there are Gentiles that were converted in Old Testament times.

However, what was not known was that Jews and Gentiles would be together in the same body of Christ, and that there would no longer be a dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles even in worship. And just to remind you of the temple in the Old Testament, there were four courts, and the outermost court was the court of the Gentiles; and if you were a non-Jew and you come to church to worship in the temple, you're on the back pew, you're way back there. And then there's the court of women. And then there's the court of Jews, which was for men. And then there's the court of priests, and then only the high priest once a year could go into the Holy of Holies.

But the point is, throughout the Old Testament during the times of the temple, there was a segregation that took place in worship, there was a separation that took place, and Jews and Gentiles did not worship together in the temple. But now in the New Testament, according to Ephesians 2, that dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been removed through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we now are all one in Christ: both Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and master, circumcised and uncircumcised. The ground at the foot of the cross is level, and we're all one in Christ. That was unheard of in the Old Testament, but it is now revealed in the New Testament.

But there's a second aspect of this mystery of Christ, which is even more astonishing. At the end of verse 27, after he says, "this mystery among the Gentiles, which is" – now here it is, this is mindboggling – "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That not only will Gentiles be brought into the

same body of Christ, but Christ will actually be living inside of believers. And we kind of take that for granted. Back then this was jaw-dropping.

"You're meaning to tell me that this coming Messiah, who has come and lived a sinless life, and died on the cross for my sins, was resurrected, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father; and when I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, He now moves into my life, and He lives in my life, and He abides in my life; and no matter where I go and what I do, Christ is inside of me, directing me, and empowering me, and meeting needs in my life; that when I need wisdom, Christ is inside of me, He provides it. When I need strength, Christ is inside of me, He provides it. When I need wisdom and direction, Christ is inside of me, and He provides it. He meets all of my needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus." That's what this mystery is. It's a fuller revelation of the gospel. It's the same gospel, it's just pulling the veil back a little bit more to see what all comes with believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, come back to Colossians 4, Colossians 4, and at the end of verse 3 he adds this. Because he adds it, we're going to address it. He says, "for which I have also been imprisoned." Paul is not in prison because he had killed somebody, he wasn't in prison because he's stolen something, he's in prison because of the mystery of Christ. He's in prison because he has preached Christ and Him crucified. And this word "imprisoned" literally means to be bound or to be fastened - and the idea is to be in chains.

Remember at this point, Paul is not in a hole in the ground, a prison, per se; that'll be his second Roman imprisonment. That would be year 67 AD. Right now it's 60-62 AD. He is in this house where he is fastened in chains to the Praetorian Guard who are the elite soldiers who are serving as Caesar's palace to provide security and safety for Caesar. Paul is such a threat to the empire because of the gospel that they're rotating the Praetorian Guard 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and they are being chained to Paul. And so Paul has opportunity to preach to them. I mean, he's got a captive audience, right?

And so Paul is just picking them off one at a time, leading them to Christ. They now go back to Caesar's palace, and they're bringing the gospel with them, and now Caesar's palace is beginning to have lots of believers inside of it. Paul could have never gotten into Caesar's palace, but the gospel has gotten in because of Paul. And so that's what he is talking about here. And so he says, "Pray for me. I'm not going to stop preaching the gospel. I'm in prison because of the gospel, but I don't have an off switch when it comes to the gospel. I'm going to always be preaching the gospel. You just need to pray that God will open the doors and give me more opportunities. And" - what he says in verse 4 - "when I do speak the gospel in these witnessing situations, these divine appointments, you need to pray for me," - verse 4 - "that I may make it clear."

Clarity is never overrated with the gospel. It's a simple gospel that even a child can understand and believe. And sometimes we as adults want to bring so much into witnessing to someone else that it becomes information overload. And so Paul says, "Just pray for me, that I'll have these opportunities and I'll capture these opportunities to witness for Christ; but that when that door swings open and I go through it and begin to tell others about Christ, pray that I can keep it simple." It's the kiss method: keep it simple, Steve, okay (k-i-s-s). "And" - Paul - "I need to make it clear in the way" - meaning manner - "I ought to speak and the way that I ought to speak out."

So this is what Paul is requesting prayer for. And you need to personalize this in your own life, that God will open doors of opportunity to witness for Christ. That's number one. Number two, that we will speak out about Christ when these doors open, that we're not going to be like an arctic river, frozen at the mouth, that we will speak out for Christ. And then, number three, that we will make the gospel clear. And number four, that God will use that to convert lost people.

Now I want to give you one example, I happen to think of this yesterday, of an example of being devoted in prayer for people to come to know the Lord. George Müller - I don't know if you're familiar with that name - he was a great man of faith, great man of prayer. In the 19th century in Bristol,

England, he headed up an orphanage. And he's well-known for never asking for any help, he just would always go to the Lord in prayer. And one time they ran out of milk in the orphanage, and there is no anything to give to the orphans. And there's a knock at the front door, and there's a milk truck that's been broken down out in front of the orphanage, and the man says, "Do you have any need for milk?" I mean, he's just that kind of person. He prays, and it's almost like heaven and earth are moving.

Well, I want to read you his account, because he decided he would pray for five men by name every day that they would come to know Christ. So listen to this. In his own words: "In November 1844 I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without a single interruption, whether I was sick, whether I was in health, whether I was on the land or on the sea, whatever the pressure on my engagements might be. Eighteen months elapsed before the first of the five were converted." He just prayed him into heaven. "Five years elapsed, and then the second was converted." Five years, every day, praying.

He writes, "Day by day I continue to pray for them, and six years passed before the third was converted. I thank God for the three, and went on praying for the other two." Thirty-six years later he wrote that the other two sons were still not converted, sons of friends of his. He wrote, "But I hope in God. I pray on, and look for the answer. They are not converted yet, but they will be."

Then 52 years after he began to pray daily, the last two men were converted, and they were converted after Müller died. The lasting effect of that man's prayers even after he went to heaven, there were still people coming to faith in Christ because of the prayers that he had offered for 52 years. I think sometimes we feel like we've gone overboard if we've prayed for someone to be saved for three or four times, or for a week, maybe a month. But there's an example of someone who devoted themselves to prayer for the door to open and for the opportunity to be there and for them to be converted.

So this is where it all begins: prayer. Talk to God about lost people before you talk to lost people about God. Second, personal evangelism, second, it necessitates godly living. In other words, we must live the gospel before the watching eyes of people before we tell them the gospel.

And so, verse 5 says, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders." "Outsiders" refers to unbelievers. They're outside the kingdom of God. They're outside the sphere of salvation. They're outside the realm of redemption. And so he says, "How you live your life in front of them is critically important, and is used by God as a spoke the wheel, a link in the chain for their coming to know the Lord."

He says, "Conduct yourselves," verse 5. The word "conduct" actually, literally means walk. And in many of Paul's passages he uses the metaphor "walk" to describe the Christian life: "Walk in a manner worthy of your calling." "Walk" is a beautiful picture of our Christian life. I mean, there's a beginning point, and there's an ending point. It began when we were born again, it will end one day when we leave this world and go to heaven, and everything in between on this walk of faith is our Christian life. And so it represents we're making progress. It also reminds us we hadn't arrived yet. And as long as we're here on the earth, there's still more of Christlikeness for us to experience in our life.

And there's an earthiness about the illustration. We're not sitting in a palace or an ivory tower, our feet are on the ground where it's dirty, and we're walking through this world in the midst of unbelievers. And so he says, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom." Now, what's wisdom? Well, wisdom is how you apply knowledge to specific situations in your life.

So, you must have knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge without wisdom is a deadly thing. You can have a head full of knowledge, but not know how to live it in your own personal life. Wisdom connects you to, really, the will of God for your life. Wisdom is all about skill in living. It's what the word "wisdom" actually means, *chokmah* in the Old Testament. It's how we put it into practice on a daily basis, how we live our lives before others. And Paul

is saying to the Colossians and to us, "You need to conduct yourself at the office, at work, at the factory, in school. You need to conduct yourself with wisdom and be able to provide the support and believability of the message that you are speaking to them."

And he says in verse 5, "making the most of the opportunity, making the most of the opportunity." "Making" here literally means redeeming or buying up. Like something is on sale right now for a limited time: "If you're going to buy it, you need to buy it right now. In fact, you need to go buy it up, because it's not going to be on sale next week like this." And what he is saying is God gives us opportunities to talk to others about Christ, and you need to buy up those opportunities when they're presented, because they may not come back up for sale again.

"An opportunity," it's a Greek word that means a very strategic moment that may not be recovered again, a limited time today that may be gone tomorrow, a passing moment. For example, those of you who are parents and you have little children, those are passing moments that'll never be recovered again. They'll never be four years old again. There'll never be five years old again. You need to buy up this opportunity now with them.

But it's not just with our children, it's with unbelievers, that we may never have this opportunity again, and they may not be at this place in their life again to hear what you have to say. And so how you live your Christian life either enhances or it inhibits the gospel. So the way you live your life, you should stand out in the office, or in the factory, in the classroom, as being different from everyone else. We all want to blend in and be like everybody else, and Paul is saying, "No, no, no; you've got to stand out and be different. Your language should be different, and people should notice that. Your actions should be different. Your reactions should be different. Your attitude at work should be different. Your humor should be different. Your honesty, your integrity should be different. Your work ethic should be different. Your joy in the midst of stress should be different. Your peace in the midst of difficulty should be different. And it is a part of what God uses, really, as an apologetic to give credence to the message that you will share with them. There should be no explanation for the difference in your life apart from Jesus Christ.

Now this leads to verse 6, and it's the third component in our personal witnessing. First, pray, that's verses 2-4; then, godly living, that's verse 5; and now, gracious speech, this is verse six 6. And so, there's an order to this. Everything begins with prayer. Then you're going to have to live it. Then you speak up. And so in other words, when God opens those doors, you've got to go through it, and you've got to speak for the Lord.

So, look at verse 6. He says, "Let your speech always be with grace." The word "speech" here refers to conversation, speaking about Christ to outsiders who were mentioned at the end of the previous verse. "Let your speech always" - at all times - "be with grace." Now when he says "grace," he's not referring to the message of grace. I mean, that's to be understood. It's talking about the manner of your speech: it should be gracious. In other words, it should be marked by kindness, and gentleness, and patience, and winsomeness. You should not be unnecessarily argumentative. You should not be brow-beating. Your words should always be with grace.

And now he uses an image here in the middle of verse 6 that I think we can understand. He says, "as those seasoned with salt." What should be seasoned with salt is our words when we witness to others. "Seasoned" here means to prepare something, or to make it ready. And so our words need to be such that they help make the way for the gospel to go into their life.

Salt enhances the flavor of food to make it more desirable, and to make it where you want to swallow it and digest it; and in the same way, the manner with which you speak the gospel makes the gospel either desirable or undesirable. So if you're going around and hitting people over the head with a Bible and saying, "Turn or burn," that's not seasoned with salt, okay, you're not making this desirable. Instead, you should be speaking in a way that is loving, and caring, and interesting, and even stimulating, that enhances that person's desire to know more about Christ, rather than just cutting them off.

And so, he says at the end of verse 6 about this speech, "so that you will know how to respond to each person." Now, "each person" refers to each unbeliever, and they're all coming from a different place, and they're all at a different place in life, and they're all of a different age, and they're all from a different religious background and church background, et cetera, and you need to know how to respond to each person. In other words, you shouldn't have a memorized canned approach that, like, you hit a button and you just say the same thing to everybody, but that you need to tailor what you say to that person based upon the questions they're asking, based upon their body countenance, based upon eye contact, based upon their religious background, based upon a lot of things.

Now he says that "you should know how to respond." That implies they're also talking, and you're not talking over them, and you're also letting them talk. I think sometimes in witnessing we do too much talking and not enough listening. And so Paul says, "You need to know how to respond." Well, that clearly implies they're asking you questions, and they're making statements. They're putting a ball in play and serving it into your court, and so you need to know how to respond to each person.

Now that's exactly the way it was with Jesus. And just to use Him as the perfect example, Jesus met people where they are and spoke to them, really, in a unique way to each person. For example, John chapter 3, Nicodemus. We read, "Jesus answered him and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, except one is born again, he will not see the kingdom of God.'" Nicodemus hasn't even asked a question yet, and Jesus is already answering him. Jesus is playing hardball with Nicodemus, almost like a rap on the forehead: "You need to be born again." And there are times and there are people in our witnessing that we need to be direct and we need to say like Jesus, "You need to be born again."

Next chapter, John 4, the woman at the well. Jesus does not play hardball with her, he approaches her: "Could you give Me a drink of water?" and He's building a bridge that He's going to walk across and tell her more. And when she's ready, at that point, "Sir, give me this water," He says, "How many husbands do you have?" and Jesus does play hardball with her at that



point, but not the first words that come out of His mouth. You see how Jesus tailors each situation depending upon if, "You're the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus," or, "You're a Samaritan woman at the well."

How about the rich young ruler. He comes up, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus has a totally different approach to him. Jesus says, "Well, keep the commandments," and He uses the fifth through the ninth commandments, which really may be the easiest. And the man says, "Oh, I've kept all those." In other words, "I've lived perfectly." This man has no concept of his own sin.

So Jesus then goes to the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet," and he sees coveting in his heart: worldliness, greed. And Jesus says, "Okay, go sell everything you have, and come back." Well, He's not saying you have to buy your way into heaven, but He is saying, "You're going to have to repent of the idols that are in your heart."

What I'm trying to show you is that Jesus had a different way to talk to different people, depending upon who they are, and where they are, and what they know, and what they don't know, and what's going on in their life. He had a different way to talk to the Pharisees. He had a different way to talk to the blind man, in John chapter 9, who Jesus healed and gave his sight, and Jesus has a totally different approach with him.

So, as you and I are living our Christian lives and we are intersecting with people, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit of God to know how to respond to each person with just the right approach with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so with some, we speak to them abruptly and directly. With others, we speak patiently and build bridges to them.

So, Paul's words here are very relevant and very practical for everyone in this house of worship today. How will you carry these out? Who do you need to begin to pray for, who's in your family, who is in your neighborhood, who is in your office, who's in your school? None of us here

today can say, "Well, there's no one in my life that needs the Lord." Every one of us has people around us who need the Lord. Will we devote ourselves in prayer? Will we pray for these people and ask God to open doors of opportunity for us so that we can speak to them? And will you live a godly life before them, and will you speak up for Christ when God gives you these opportunities? These are important questions that I'm asking each one of us today.

Others of you here today have not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ. And so as I conclude this message, this is my door of opportunity with you. God has swung the door open today, this moment, for me to speak to you. And I need everyone in this building to pray for me, as I would share the gospel to those who need the gospel here today; and I need to season my speech with salt to make it desirable to you.

So here's what I want to say to you. You have an eternal soul made in the image of God. You're unlike a tree, you're unlike a fish, you're unlike a rock. You are made in the image of God; and in the image of God, you are made to know Him, you are made to have a relationship with God. But there is something in your life that has totally disrupted this relationship that you could have had, and it's sin. You've sinned and you've fallen short of the glory of God. And God is holy, and God cannot have fellowship with sinners. And so you need to address your sin problem.

God has addressed it. God has sent His Son into this world: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but would have everlasting life. God has demonstrated His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And so Jesus Christ the Son of God went to the cross and He bore the sins of all the people who would ever believe in Him. He was raised on the third day, He has ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and the Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

That's a decision you have to make, to call upon the name of the Lord. No one else can do this for you. Your spouse cannot do this, your parents cannot do this for you, only you can exercise your will and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you would believe in Jesus Christ today – and it can take place that quick – God would wipe the slate clean of all the sins that you have ever committed and ever will commit, just completely wipe the slate clean. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." And God would clothe you with the perfect righteousness of His own Son, such that when God looks at you, He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ draped on you. He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ. Are you hearing this?

And then Christ moves into your life: Christ in you, the hope of glory. And He moves in, and He'll never move out. And He is there to give you the abundant life that only He can give. He will walk with you every step of the way.

Do you understand the offer that is being extended to you today? And if you would believe in Christ, when you die, Christ would be waiting for you in heaven, and He would receive you to Himself, and He would take you into the Father's house, and there you would live forever and ever and ever. You will never hear a greater offer being extended to you right now. And if you're here today without Christ, this is your day of opportunity. This is your moment with God and with Christ. And you may never have another moment like this again for the rest of your life. You may hear the gospel again, but your heart will be harder, your eyes will be even blinder, your ears will be even deafer. You need to respond to the Lord today, this moment, while you have this opportunity.

And so wherever you're seated in this house of worship, God knows where you are, and God knows your heart; and if you would call upon the name of the Lord, just like that, He would save you, He would convert you, He would clothe you with the perfect righteousness of Christ, and you would be His forever and ever. If you're that one here today without Christ, then this, what I've just said, is for you; it has your name on it. This is your divine

appointment, and I pray that you will respond with faith in Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father in heaven, thank You for today and this opportunity for us to meet and to be together, and to hear Your word explained, and to worship You. And I pray that as we leave from here today that we will be the witnesses for You that You desire us to be. Bless Your people here, and save those who are outsiders. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

Receive the benediction, and you're dismissed: "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." God bless you.