
THE PROGRAM FOR CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT

Colossians 4:2-6
Jason Brodehl

INTRODUCTION

GOSPEL WITNESS DECLARED

After college graduation, I decided to pursue a career in the college football as a coach. I secured a graduate assistantship at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. On the first day of Fall camp, we had player position meeting. And, as assigned, I met with the defensive linemen. The coach, who was a mature man, handed out the player manuals to each of us. But before we opened the manual/playbook, he shared his testimony. He made it clear how important Jesus was to him and his life. For young men, one being myself, it was very bold and impressionable moment.

GOSPEL WITNESS DESTROYED

Immediately following that proclamation, this coach then went into a profanity laced description of the type of player it takes to play that position. In that instant, he destroyed his witness. My heart sank. He must have seen it on my face because he followed up with after the meeting and tried to explain his actions. He said, "That's the language these young understand." He didn't even make it day before his true colors were showing. To me, he was not the man he claimed to be. You can say all that you want about Christ but if you live and speak by the ways of world, your witness is meaningless. They carry zero weight and power.

Have you ever experienced this? Where a person claims Christ but lives like the world. How does it make you feel? Maybe you have been that person. Maybe you still ARE that person. From our text this morning, we will that we have a responsibility to declare Christ to the world globally and locally. My hope this morning is that you see how our communication with God on behalf of or for people, fuels gospel growth in our communication to people about God. Before we begin let's pray.

OUR COMMUNICATION TO GOD FOR PEOPLE (COL. 4:2-4)

We are in Colossians 4, verses 2-6. Turn there if you have not yet done so. This text follows on the heels of Paul's description of a believer's life in marriage, family, and employment. Paul shifts the focus outward now addressing the church's witness to the unbelieving world. Paul, knowing the importance of dependence upon God, ends this writing about prayer, our communication with God. Follow along with me as I read Colossians 4:2-4.

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

PRAYER PROTECTS THE CHURCH'S PURITY (COL. 4:2)

Paul is ending this letter where he began, speaking on prayer. Twice in chapter 1 Paul his prayer for them. In one instance, he said, that they "always thank God for them" (1:3) and then again in verse 9, he says:

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

He thanks God for them and has not ceased to pray for them. He models prayer the importance this dependence upon God. Note the plural pronouns. He says, “we have not ceased to pray”. Paul is not praying alone. He and his missionary team is praying for the church at Colossae. And remember this too, they are praying for the entire church, meaning everyone in that church. This is a collective effort between of family of God. Even though they are physically separated and have not even met, he has a heart for this church. Why? He didn’t plant it. Paul sees this church, and all other churches, as part of the body of Christ. We are all one. We are laboring for the gospel and bring the light and hope of the gospel to a lost and fallen world. And so, in the closing of this letter, he exhorts them to continue to pray.

DEVOTED TO PRAYER

In fact, he writes, continue steadfastly in prayer. Other translations say, be devoted to prayer. What does it mean to be devoted? Being devoted to something means being focused on that particular thing almost exclusively. When you are devoted to a cause, you work to achieve its goals. When you are devoted to a person, you place their needs above your own. Some people are devoted to diet and exercise. Others are devoted to their jobs and still others are devoted to their children. The point is devotion equals priority. What is the priority in your life? What are you devoted to? We will schedule our children’s events, plan our days, and go through our daily routines, and give prayer no spot on our calendars. Now, I am not saying you have to schedule prayer. But is it a priority? When Jesus entered the temple and saw the money changers, he overthrew their tables and said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” They miss used the temple for personal gain. Do we miss used the church in that way? Jesus saw his house, us, the body of Christ, as the living temple. And that temple, us, would be a people of prayer. To be devoted to prayer is to come to the throne of grace daily regardless of the results. We come day after day knowing all that we need resided in Jesus. It’s like the parable of persistent widow. Devoted prayer keeps our minds set on the things above and not the things below. Be devoted to prayer.

WATCHFUL PRAYER

But not only are we to continue steadfastly in prayer but we are to be watchful in it. As Jesus approached His impending crucifixion, He took his disciples to the garden Gethsemane to pray. Do you recall what He said to His disciples? “Watch and pray that you may not enter temptation. The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” In the waning moments of His life, Jesus asks His brothers to pray for themselves! He knew that man is easily distracted and tempted.

I am not sure if anyone has read the book *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, if you haven’t I would encourage you to do so. It is series of letters written between a senior demon named Screwtape, and his nephew, Wormwood. In one of the letters, Wormwood addresses the subject of prayer. In that letter, he says this, *“You no longer need a good book, which he really likes, to keep him from his prayers or his work or his sleep; a column of advertisements in yesterday’s paper will do. You can make him waste his time not only in conversation he enjoys with people whom he likes, but in conversations with those he cares nothing about on subjects that bore him. You can make him do nothing at all for long periods. You can keep him up late at night, not roistering (which means partying or having a good time) but staring at a dead fire in a cold room (or dead screen in the living room). All the healthy and outgoing activities which we want him to avoid can be inhibited and nothing given in return, so that at last he may say, as one of my own patients said on his arrival down here, “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked”.*¹ How much time do you squabble away, with TV, internet, apps, games, busy work, housework, home projects, etc.?

¹ Lewis, C.S. (2002). *The Screwtape Letters*. HarperCollins, New York, NY

Our enemy wants nothing more than to be distracted from praying. Have you ever began to pray, and in the middle of it, you find yourself thinking on the day ahead? Or you start thinking about the grocery list? WE are so easily distracted. Jesus knew this and so did Paul. Even as we pray, we must guard our hearts and minds. It can be a struggle, but it is vital for your personal spiritual growth and for the protection and purity of this church. Devoted, watchful prayer protects the church's purity.

THANKFUL PRAYER

Paul is not done, He says be steadfast in prayer, be watchful in it, and pray with thanksgiving. Even as he sits locked in a prison cell, he encourages thankful prayer. I don't think Paul has in mind being thankful for a roof over your head, food on your table, and clothes on your back. Yes, we ought to be thankful every day that our needs are met. This teaches contentment. But Paul's basis for his thankfulness in this letter is attached to the gospel. In this letter alone he thanks God for their faith and love (1:3) and then he thanks the Father who has enable them to share in the heavenly inheritance (1:12). And then in chapter 3, he tells always be thankful in everything. Is there such a thing as an ungrateful Christian? There ought not to be. Ungratefulness steers our focus on ourselves. A complaining and ungrateful Christian is the antithesis of the gospel. It destroys our gospel witness. How do we avoid this? By filling our minds with gospel truth. This keeps our heart fresh with grace and power. Thankfulness fuels gospel growth in our hearts and it fuels worship of Him. Be thankful in your prayers to God. Be thankful for Christ, the supreme and sufficient savior. Devoted, watchful and thankful prayer protects the church's purity.

PRAYER FUELS GOSPEL GROWTH IN THE WORLD (COL. 4:3-4)

But not only does prayer protect the church's purity, but it also fuels gospel growth in the world. Look with me at verses 3 & 4.

³*At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—* ⁴*that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

WHEN PRAYING FOR MISSIONARIES (V.3A)

Let's take a moment to reflect on Paul's life. At the time of this letter, he was imprisoned. Prior to this imprisonment, he encountered countless beatings, he had been stoned and shipwrecked. He faced dangers from rivers, robbers, Jews, Gentiles, and false brothers (2 Cor. 21-29). This man planted multiple churches throughout the known world. You would think, by his experience, he would say, "Church of Colossae. Go plant churches. Follow this my "program". This is how you spread the gospel." This experienced, devoted, missionary asks for prayer. Why? Because he understood what Jesus meant when He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" in Matthew 28. The mission of gospel growth begins with prayer. How often are we praying for our missionary endeavors across the seas? Just because you feel no personal attachment to our missionaries in Romania and Africa doesn't mean they don't need your prayers. Paul did not visit all the churches in his lifetime but continued steadfastly in prayer for them. He had a deep understanding of the gospel and its power. Paul had the heart of Christ, a desire to see all people come to saving faith. Do you? Sometimes we are so self-focused in what we ask of God. We focus our prayers on ourselves, our families, and our local church. Yes, pray for these things. I am not saying they deserve prayer, but this gospel, this kingdom God has brought us into, is bigger than our little world. The whole world needs to hear gospel, and this church is part of a global missionary endeavor. Pray for them. I believe in the new creation, when we will see all the redeemed, for those who we prayed for whether or not we knew their names, will be thankful for those prayers. We will never know the effect of our prayers for those we do not know. Do you have a passion for the supremacy of God that that is manifested in love for one another and

multiplied by love for the lost as our mission statement says? Our prayers fuel gospel growth in the world when we pray for our missionaries.

WHEN PRAYING FOR OPEN DOORS (V.3B)

As Paul sits, imprisoned, locked behind a closed door, he makes two requests. The first: open doors for the word. Think about that irony. He didn't ask for his chains to be removed or his freedom. No, it is for a door to be opened for him and his missionary team. Even though he can't travel, the rest of the body of Christ can. You see, he views all his brothers, like Epaphras and Onesimus and Tychicus, and the church at Colossae, as all laboring together for the gospel. We may not be able to travel to our missionary outposts, but we sure can labor with them in the gospel in our prayers. Pray God will growth the gospel by praying for open doors for our missionaries.

WHEN PRAYING FOR GOSPEL CLARITY (V.4)

Paul's second request is for gospel clarity. Paul often uses the term "mystery" when speaking about the gospel. The goal is to make this mystery clear or plain. But let's clear here. The gospel is not a mystery because it is confusing or obscure like a tricky riddle. It's a mystery because no one would ever know it or think of it unless God had made it plain. We make the gospel message confusing when we add to its message. When make it only about political party, morality, and laws. Or when we make it about "sides" and "candidates". It becomes an "us" versus "them" mentality. Sometimes we limit its scope. We need to pray we keep the gospel mystery clear for our missionaries and for ourselves. The mystery is the glorious grace of Jesus who forgives all who come to Him in humble repentance and submission. John Piper describes this mystery like this:

- *That the Son of God should become man.*
- *That he should live a life of poverty and love.*
- *That he should die in the place of sinners and bear the curse of the law though he was sinless.*
- *That he should rise from the dead and reign in heaven today.*
- *That the ungodly should be justified by faith.*
- *That Jew and Gentile, red and yellow, black and white should be reconciled in one body to God.*
- *And that Christ should dwell in our hearts and seal us for glory.²*

That's the gospel. We need to pray that our missionaries proclaim it with clarity.

OUR COMMUNICATION TO PEOPLE ABOUT GOD (4:5-6)

So, we have a responsibility to communicate to God on behalf of others. But we have a responsibility to communicate to people about God. Our communication comes in two forms. First, in our way of life, and secondly, in our way with words. Follow along with in verses 5 and 6.

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

IN OUR WAY OF LIFE (V.5)

BY OUR CONDUCT

Paul often uses the word "walk" at a metaphor for the way we live and conduct our lives. The implication is that, as believers as we go about our lives in a pagan world, we need wisdom to make our encounters with unbelievers

² Piper, John. 2007. [Sermons from John Piper \(1980-1989\)](#). Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God.

fruitful. The focus here is on lifestyle evangelism—living in such a way that “proclaims” Christ to the world.³ Often times, we will speak more about the gospel with our actions than our words. There is an old idiom that says, “Actions speak louder than words.” Another one says, “People hear more what you do than what you say.” Paul said it elsewhere like this, “Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.” (1 Cor. 10:32) Allow me to place a note here. Living blamelessly may look like repenting and seeking forgiveness when we do fail, because we will. That humility is difficult to find today. That may speak more than you know. Charles Spurgeon says it like this, “Live in such a way that men may recognize that you have been with Jesus.”

REDEEMING OUR TIME

The idea here is to “buy up the time”. We have been given new life in Christ, be ready to give a reason for the hope you have. It’s an opportunistic way of life. When our minds are set on things above, we will engage with unbelievers in gospel-grounded, Christ-centered, cross embracing, God-glorifying ways. We will be open to opportunities to express Christ-exalting sacrifice and love toward outsiders. In a world already full of evil, our task is to fill it with good.⁴

IN OUR WAY WITH WORDS (v.6)

So, our way of life speaks of Christ, but Paul now zeroes in on our way with words. Let me read verse 6 again.

⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

IN THE WAY WE SPEAK

GRACIOUSLY

Jesus said it this way, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Our speech is an overflow of the attitude of our hearts. For our speech to be gracious, our hearts must be filled with grace. Only a heart that’s filled with grace can and will speak graciously. That’s why our communication with God fuels is communication with others. If you are filled with the grace and goodness of the gospel, then your speech will be gracious toward outsiders. We are ambassadors for Christ, speaking on His behalf, speak Christ speaks to you. It is kind and courteous speech.

SEASONED WITH SALT

Not only is our speech to be gracious but seasoned with salt. What a Christian says ought to add value to the conversations and in our responses. Our words should be uplifting and/or helpful. It is to bring a winsomeness in our communication with others. We have something to give. We hold the “words of eternal life” because we have the gospel. Look, even if we speak graciously to outsiders, do not be surprised they respond to you with anger. To some, we are the aroma of Christ, to others we are the stench of death (2 Cor. 2:15). But don’t be deceived and caught off guard by others and thus pulled into foolish debates and quarrels. Paul wrote this in 2 Timothy, ²⁴ *the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,* ²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,* ²⁶ *and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

³ Osborne, Grant R. 2016. [Colossians & Philemon: Verse by Verse](#). Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ Ibid. Osbourne

IN OUR REPLIES

Grace is the salt which seasons our discourse, makes it savory, and keeps it from corrupting. *That you may know how to answer every man.* One answer is proper for one man, and another for another man (Prov. 26:4, 5). We have need of a great deal of wisdom and grace to give proper answers to every man, particularly in answering the questions and objections of adversaries against our religion, giving the reasons of our faith, and showing the unreasonableness of their exceptions. *Be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear,* 1 Pt. 3:15.⁵

What is interesting here is that Paul does not say actively seek to purposefully engage all people. He says, seek wisdom so that you “may know ow you ought to answer each person.” Matthew Henry put it like this, “*Now Paul’s advice to the Christians is not along the lines of possessing oneself of better techniques with which to approach people. Rather he turns the problem right around so that the Christians can see their responsibilities in a much more promising light. Their privilege, simply put, is to answer everyone. That is to say they are to respond to the questions of others rather than initiate conversations on leading topics; they are to accept openings rather than make them.*”⁶ You see, if we are truly living a gospel-grounded, Christ-centered, cross embracing, God-glorifying life, you will stand out. You will attract attention at some point. Be ready to answer those who seek you out.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

In the reflect and respond I think the best word to use here is what are the implications of this message for this text. I begin with the central message being our communication with God about people fuels our communication to people about God. Throughout my message I purposefully inserted thoughtful questions for you to think about. It’s easy to reduce this sermon, I need to pray more or witness more. But at the end of the day, that is behavior modification. What we need is to be even more gripped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need is to be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of “all” the saints in light.” Because “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:9-14)

⁵ Henry, Matthew. 1994. [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#). Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁶ Lucas, R. C. 1980. [Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon](#). The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.