

Dealing with Outsiders

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[0:00] We're going to Colossians 4, and we're going to read verses 2-6. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

And pray for us too that God may open a door for our message! So that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Well, Paul is giving us some last-minute instructions. And so we're all bundled up. The bags are packed, and Grandma is waiting in the driveway. And like a parent, he's now saying, remember this.

So why do we say those things? Don't fight. Listen to Grandma. Make sure that you obey. We say those things, maybe, probably, just because we really hope they'll do it.

[1:13] Of all the things that we want them to do at Grandma's house, we want them to obey those last-minute commands. We want them to think about it. We're hoping they take it to heart, and it goes with them.

And so you can easily imagine that Paul is feeling that way now, as he's getting ready to close up this letter to the Colossians. And he has some last-minute things to say, after all the other things that he's said.

And so here it is. This is what he wants us to have ringing in our ears, so to speak, as we close this book. And he says, remember to pray.

The Christian life is an internal life. It's an inside life. It involves prayer. Remember to pray. Pray for me. Pray for a door. Pray for clarity. And then today he says, now be wise.

Be wise in how you act toward outsiders. So prayer is an internal part of the Christian life, but there is also an external part of the Christian life, how you act toward outsiders.

[2:22] And so that's what we're going to talk about today, dealing with outsiders. Dealing with outsiders. How do we treat them? How do we act toward them? What should our stance be? And I think this is probably one of the most important things that we could think of.

This is for every Christian here. If you're a Christian, by God's grace, you're on the inside, but there are people on the outside who are a part of your life. And so what do you do with that?

How do you treat them? And so it's something facing you every day. It faces you at work. You go to work with outsiders.

It faces you at family reunions. It faces you at holidays. It faces you on your street. It faces you on the soccer fields on Saturday and on the grocery store on Thursday.

It's a normal, it's a regular, it's an everyday part of our life of dealing, of having interactions with outsiders. So ladies, you have outsiders in your life.

[3:23] There's family on your street or families on your street. Maybe they're part of your family or where you work. Even children. If you're a Christian, you have cousins, you have friends that you play with, you have people at your school who don't know Jesus.

So how do you act toward them? Well, Paul's going to tell us. And then young people, high schoolers, college age, there's people all around you in your school, in your classes, where they're even antagonistic towards the gospel.

They don't like it. They have an opinion against it. They don't know Jesus. And so how do you, how do you treat those kinds of people? How do you act toward them? Well, Paul's going to tell us.

And, and I think this is just so helpful because this is a hard thing to do, isn't it? It's one of those areas, I think, where a lot of times we have even good intentions and we don't know quite what to

say or we don't know quite how to deal with the situation at hand.

It's a hard thing to do right and it's an easy thing to do wrong. And so, how do you handle that hard situation that we're all in if we're a Christian living in this present age?

[4:48] Well, Paul is going to tell you. And he says, it's a first a matter of how you act. Then it's a matter of what you say. So that's the whole Christian, that's the whole everything of life.

We act and we talk. So Paul's going to tell us how to act and then he's going to tell us how to talk. And so this is a very simple message with just those two points. And I think simple messages are good.

God our Father is coming beside us and he's saying, now this is how you act in this situation and this is how you talk. So first, how to act. He says, be wise.

Be wise. That's the first thing on the agenda. To be wise. To be thoughtful. To be clear-headed. To be thinking strategically. Thinking carefully. There's no room for any sort of sloppy laziness here. Dealing, working with outsiders is not something that we can just coast in on and just handle as we go. It involves thinking. It involves wisdom. And so, teens, what do you need every day?

[5:54] Well, in all your getting, get wisdom. Wisdom is supreme. Shame, therefore, get wisdom. So men, you are on the job. You are working with people who don't care about God.

So what do you need most of all? You need wisdom. And men, it doesn't matter how old we are. It doesn't matter how much water is under the bridge and how much experience we have.

We need wisdom, don't we? the thing to know what to do, to know what to say. And James' promise comes to us, if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault.

And that means, are you foolish? You don't quite know what to do. Are you at a loss? Well, that's fine. Come to God, ask Him, and He'll give you the wisdom that you need.

He's not going to find fault with you for needing wisdom. He says, just come and I'll give it. And so be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Be wise because they are judging Christianity by what they see in you.

[7:09] They're judging Christianity by what they see in you. The world doesn't judge the gospel by what Jesus did and said. You know that? Most of the time, they have no idea what Jesus did and said.

They're not going back and looking and saying, oh, this is what Jesus did. I think I'll look into this Christianity thing. The world doesn't judge the gospel by the Christian books we read or the Christian books that we write.

The world doesn't judge Christianity based on our doctrine even, our confession, where we stand on certain controversies. The world couldn't care less about any of that.

The world sees Christianity and the validity of the gospel in only one place. In you. In you.

In you. You are the light of the world. And so Paul says, be wise. Be wise in the way that you act toward outsiders. Be wise.

[8:09] And so do you see your whole posture should be saying, how can I act? How can I treat them in order to win them? How can I help them to come to faith?

How can I disarm them? How can I show that their arguments aren't valid, that there's more to it than what they've realized? How can I show them that Jesus really is the Savior, that he is really the best thing that could happen to a person?

That I am different, that things are different and things are even better now because I am a Christian. How can I make Christianity and Christ beautiful to them?

You see the posture that Paul is telling us to take. It's not one primarily of defensive, where we're always getting hit by the blows and we're never acting towards them. He says, how you act toward outsiders.

It's genuinely proactive. And so in all your dealings, you want to say, is this the best way to do this? Is this the best way to act? Is this the best way to win someone to Christ?

[9:13] Will this make Jesus look good or will this make him look bad? And you can't say it doesn't matter what you say or do because it does. It does.

Because he says, make the most of every opportunity. Make the most of every opportunity. It matters what you do with those opportunities, what we do with those opportunities before outsiders. And so who is the wise shopper? Who is the wise shopper? Well, the wise shopper is a person who sees a bargain and when they see it and they know it's a good deal, they take it.

They buy it up. And so when they see a steal, they go for it and they don't wait around for a better opportunity. They don't wait around for something better to come along. They take what is given them.

They don't delay, they buy it up. So, that's what Paul is saying here. When you see a deal, when you see an opportunity to act toward outsiders in a good way, buy it up.

[10:20] Well, this past, I think it was Wednesday, Amazon had their prime day and it was every, you know, all these great sales. And then Walmart saw, oh, whoa, they're going to have a good sale, so we have to compete.

And all of a sudden, in the middle of July, there are deals better than Black Friday out there if you can, if you want them. So maybe some of you got some deals. There was a one-day opportunity to get a great deal in the middle of July on all sorts of electronics and all sorts of things.

So what does a wise shopper do? A wise shopper gets the deals while he can get them. And that's what Paul is talking about. How do you be wise toward outsiders? Well, you have your eyes open for opportunities and when you see an opportunity to serve, to talk, to love, to care, to make Jesus Christ beautiful for them, you buy it up.

You snatch it up. I just read of a lady who was out antiquing and, well, it was on this forum about what was the greatest deal you ever got.

And this lady was out antiquing and she saw some prints from a very well-known English artist. I've never heard of him but he's apparently very well-known because some of his stuff is worth hundreds, thousands of dollars.

[11:37] And she was out shopping and she saw a couple of these prints for 10 cents each. So what would you do? Well, you would do what she did.

She bought them up, spent 20 cents and ended up making thousands of dollars. What is our stance toward those on the outside?

Well, it's like an eager, wise shopper. Like a businessman who's looking for an opportunity to make a deal and then finally when an opportunity comes up, he takes it.

He takes it. So the world is getting hostile. Again, the world is getting hostile and so the natural reaction is going to be defensive, to hunker down.

And it was hostile in Paul's day. But did he say now, clam up, be quiet, shut the door, shut the door of your heart, just take care of yourself, retreat into the Christian ghetto, just care about what you have here, just care about what we have here, and this is wonderful what we have here, and it can be so good that we forget that some people don't have it.

[12:51] So we retreat into this Christian ghetto, we shut the door, we shut the door of our heart, we shut the door of our mind, we say, us four, no more, shut the door. Paul says, don't miss an opportunity.

Don't miss an opportunity. The Greek God of opportunity, his name was Kairos, it's the word used here, it's for opportunity, for time, and so he was the youngest son of Zeus, and he was a very flighty little God.

He never walked anywhere, he always ran, he was always running wherever he went, he never slowed down for anything, and he had the weirdest hairdo you had ever seen or heard of.

Kids, you can do this for the next picture day. He had this long lock of hair right here on the middle of his forehead, right here. And other than that, he was completely bald in the back.

And he ran everywhere he got, everywhere he went. And if you could catch him very easily, if you saw him coming and you were able to snatch him when you had a chance, but once he was gone, there was nothing to grab a hold of.

[14:07] That's opportunity. Paul says, seize every opportunity. Grab it. Redeem it. Buy it up. Grab the chance to do something, to say something, to witness, to love, to serve, to help, to make Jesus Christ attractive.

Don't miss an opportunity. Grab it while you have a chance, because if you can see it coming and you can seize it, you have it. But once it's gone, you know it's gone. It's gone.

Sometimes there isn't an opportunity, but then sometimes there is. Paul says, grab it while you can. Now, I think this is very helpful because this tells me that the way I should be looking outside of me in my own and looking out into the world is not with hostility.

It's not with hopelessness of like, that's it. it's all going to hell now. It's all, everything is just gone. But as opportunities, as opportunities to take a hold of them, not as hopeless cases, but as people

to witness to, to care about, to convince, to shine in front of, not to worry about or worry on and to hate on them, not as hopeless, but as opportunities.

So, how should we be doing our life? Well, we should be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. Shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves, that's what we want, don't we?

[15 : 56] So we know what to say and yet we do it with such an attractiveness and an innocence that it wins people. Jesus was as clever as they came.

He was astoundingly clever and sharp, but he was as innocent as a lamb. He always knew how to answer everyone and yet when it came time to find a fault with him, they had to lie about him in order to find something.

And we can strive for that and we should strive for that sort of balance or combination of shrewdness and innocence. And that's not some sort of just pie-in-the-sky pastoral wish for you. It's something that we can have because the Spirit of Christ is within us. He's within us. And you can do this because you are joined to Jesus.

He is in you and you are in him and you share a life. He's the fruitful vine. He is the tree of life and we share in his life. And so, when you're on the job, men, when you're on the job, teens, see it as it is, an opportunity.

[17 : 05] Not just as a place to make money for you, although that is part of it, but as a place to serve and love those who you are around as an opportunity.

And so think, if you act foolishly, if you act foolishly, if you act wickedly, if you act, if you treat people badly, what are they going to think about Jesus? What are they going to think about Jesus?

But if you have this wonderful chance to show them that Jesus really does make a difference, that I treat people with dignity and respect, I obey with a good attitude, I show up on time, and when problems come, I handle them in a totally different way than other people do, what is that going to say about Jesus?

Well, they'll see it, and they'll wonder, and then they're going to say something, and then you're going to have a chance to talk, and that brings us to our second point, how to talk, how to talk. Verse six, let your conversation, the word is logos, let your word, your speech, be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone, so that you can know how to answer everyone.

[18 : 24] So it's assuming that people are going to be asking us, well, why do you do that? So here, or why do you believe that? Or some question about our faith, about Jesus Christ, and so now, here's the chance to say something.

Our lives should invite questions, and our words should win them. So what wins people? What draws people in? Well, grace does.

Grace does. And I think the idea here is not so much what we say, but how we say it. Our whole speech, our whole demeanor, should be gracious, kind, sweet, attractive, gentle.

And where does that come from? That comes from grace in our hearts, doesn't it? When grace is working down here, out of the overflow of your heart, your mouth speaks.

grace. So where does that kind, beautiful, attractive, gentle speech come from? It comes from a heart that's drinking in the grace of God, and the gospel is good news to that heart.

[19 : 39] And so, grace in the heart leads to a beautiful speech, a beautiful demeanor. And that's how Paul is, I think, using this word.

It's the idea of, the way a ballerina is full of grace. Her movements are attractive. Her motions are attractive. They draw you in.

It's not lumbering, thumping, brutish, you know, thuggish kind of speech. It's full of beauty, full of kindness, full of sweetness, full of gentleness, full of whatever that attracts people into us.

And we say, you know, they say some different things, but the way they say it, the way they say it, and that is wisdom in action. That is what wisdom does to a heart, and that's what wisdom does to a tongue.

It changes the way that you look at people and treat them and speak to them. Listen to just the book of Proverbs. Here's three Proverbs, and this is all within five verses of each other.

[20 : 44] The wise and hard are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction. How are you going to help an unbeliever come to know Jesus?

Well, pleasant words promote instruction. A wise man's heart guides his mouth and his lips promote instruction. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

So wisdom isn't ugly. Wisdom isn't abrasive. Wisdom is beautiful. Wisdom uses pleasant words, kind words, helpful words, sensitive words.

And so, you know, that church, the Westboro Church, and they're always yelling and screaming those all such nasty, hateful things, and they've never won anyone to Christ with that kind of language, with that kind of demeanor.

and all they do is make people hate Jesus more. And we could say, well, we'd never do that. We'd never go that far, and I don't think we ever would.

[21 : 49] But we do have to watch out for the cynicism! And the sarcasm! And the hopelessness! And the judgmental, ridiculing speech.

And that can be very easy for us, because God has done such wonderful things in our lives, but sometimes we forget what it is like to be lost, to not really have any idea what's going on.

And so it's easy for us to forget where we were, and then judge them, and condemn them for where they are. And so, if that kind of stuff is going on in your heart, it's better not to speak.

than to open up your mouth and bring out something ugly. And sometimes in our immaturity, we think wisdom as being above people.

And being, I know, they don't know, I've arrived in some way, and they're still so far away, and they're not even moving in the right direction. And you know that attitude. Where I am what I am, and I'm righteous, and I'm good, and so we say things, and we say things in a way that they should never be said.

[23 : 04] The Pharisees, it just reminds me of the Pharisees yelling at the man who was born blind. Jesus healed him, it's in John 9, and they don't like what he says.

They don't like what he says about Jesus, and so when all else fails, they just yell at him. They say, you were steeped in sin at birth, how dare you lecture us?

Do you get that? You see where they're at? We're smart. We're righteous. So in their great religious, righteous superiority, they threw him out. They were so wise that no one could dare lecture them.

They were so wise, but they weren't at all, were they? And so judgmental and harsh and holier than thou, righteous know-it-alls are fools.

But the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, and considerate, submissive, full of mercy, full of mercy and good fruit.

[24 : 08] And so until you see that you needed mercy, and God gave you mercy, and until you see, oh, I am still such a mess sometimes.

I am still such a mess, and God still loves me. Until that sort of thing is going on in your heart, you're not going to be able to speak grace with any sort of feeling towards other people. You're going to have a hard time sharing the good news with people because the good news really isn't all that good to you.

But once that gets in you where, oh, I was totally a lost cause, and now that I've been saved a while, I see I was worse off than I ever thought I was. But He still loves me, and He's so patient with me, and so even now I haven't arrived.

I've got so far to go, but God is so patient and kind. I was once on the outside, but now I'm on the inside, and once I was far away, but now I've been reconciled to Him. And so that changes the way that we look at those people.

That really comes into us because if that happened to me, it could happen to them. It could happen to them. So how to speak?

[25 : 15] Graciously, kindly, sweetly, gently, beautifully, full of the gospel. Not sandpaper and battery acid. Not demeaning, but winsomely.

And then He says, seasoned with salt. Seasoned with salt. Now what does that mean? What does seasoned with salt mean? Well, I think what He's doing here, and I have pretty good support for this, He's using a Greco-Roman idiom.

Now an idiom is, it's like a phrase that its literal meaning and how we use it are totally different things.

So for example, if someone is bothering me, I might say, go fly a kite. Right? And I don't literally mean go fly a kite. I mean, go jump off of a bridge.

Wait, I don't mean that literally. I mean, get lost. Right? Well, I don't mean any of those things. I mean, be quiet, leave me alone, and go away.

[26:24] So we have these idioms in English, ways of talking that literally don't mean exactly how we're using them. So Paul is using this Greco-Roman idiom, and it means winsome.

It means winning. It means thoughtful, interesting. It means even humorous, witty. So for example, one ancient historian was writing about some philosophers way back when called the academics. And I don't know anything about them except they must have been really long-winded because this ancient historian writing about them says their great long speeches are not seasoned with salt, is what he says.

And by that, he means they never get to the point. They're tedious. They're boring. I don't know what they're talking about. They go on forever and ever and people are just bored out of their brains.

That's what it means to not be seasoned with salt. But then they, another person referring to this man named Aristophanes, and Aristophanes is a Greek poet and a Greek dramatist, so he made plays.

[27:38] But he made very comical plays. He made plays that made fun of the philosophers, and he made fun of Plato. And so he used language not to talk about esoteric, pie-in-the-sky philosophical ideas.

He used language that was funny, that was humorous, that was witty, that was smart, that was intelligent, to poke holes in the philosophers. And they said about Aristophanes that his words were seasoned with salt.

Do you get the idea? that, so what Paul is telling us is not only is our speech to be gracious, it's to be winsome, it's to be to the point, it's not to be dull and boring.

So we're excited about the gospel, and that excitement is to come across in how we talk about it. And so, when you're talking to outsiders, and when they've asked you what you believe, or what makes you tick, or why are you doing this, Paul's saying, don't launch into some sort of long-winded, impersonal diatribe about the history of this and that, and the ways and means, and all that sort of stuff.

He's saying, get to the point, make it interesting, use words with flavor, and so as you're speaking, those words become inviting to people.

[29:08] That's what Jesus did, didn't he? So the idea is not, when he says, be full of grace, he's not saying, there's no confrontation ever, or there's no pointed finger, or no putting your finger on something.

No, it's not avoid all confrontation. It's supposed to be, we're sweet, with a little bit of a bite, with a little bit of something that is sharp, that's potent.

So maybe you've seen those chocolate bars on the shelf there, those big \$3 candy bars where it's 80% cocoa, and it's mixed with chili peppers. Have you seen those?

Have you ever had one? It's sweet, but it's a bit spicy too. That's what our language is to be like. It's gracious, winsome, yet there's something confrontational about it.

And that's how Jesus did it. And Jesus was the master at it. And so he's sitting there with a very intelligent, very smart, very religious rabbi named Nicodemus in John chapter 3, and he says, you must be born again.

[30:26] Now those words are just old words for us, old worn out words, but Nicodemus is instantly interested in this. He says, I must be born again.

What are you talking about? So those weren't old words for him. Nicodemus had never heard anything like that before. And if you think about it, it wasn't an altogether very nice thing that Jesus said about him.

He was saying, the life that you were living, the way you've been doing, all your righteousness, everything you've been building your life on, it's not good enough. You have to start over.

You must be born again. You, the way you are, is not good enough. You must be born again. But Jesus said it in such an interesting and compelling way that Nicodemus is not offended.

He instantly wants to know more. He wants to know more. And so Jesus takes them in. But it's always to the point. It's always personal.

[31:28] And it's never theoretical. Well, Jesus gives us another example in the very next chapter in John chapter 4. And he's not talking to a really smart religious person.

Now he's talking to a Samaritan woman. woman. And she is not righteous in anyone's standards. And here he doesn't talk about being born again.

He talks about living water. And that's an interesting idea. She had never thought of that. But he knew she was thirsty. It was hot.

It was the middle of the day. She's at the well. She's obviously thirsty. He knew she was thirsty. She knew she was thirsty. Her mouth is dry. She wants water. And at the same time, her soul is dry. Her soul is dry. She knows that. And Jesus knows it too. And that's when he says, I can give you living water. And he confronted her too.

[32 : 33] He did it so graciously though. Well, go bring your husband. I have no husband. No, you have five. The man you're living with now is not your husband.

So, her water, her spiritual water was gone, wasn't it? She had dug that well five times. And she was working on it a sixth. And yet, she was dry.

And yet, she was dead. And Jesus now here is at the very end. The very end of all that and says, I can give you living water.

Jesus was a master. He knew how to answer everyone. And thankfully, we can say, well, we can say more than, well, I wish I was more like that.

because we have a spirit to teach us. We have a spirit to guide us. We have prayer to call in reinforcements, to pray for wisdom.

[33 : 37] We have his word to teach us what to say. And we have God himself with us. And we have his promise. We have his promises to be with us to the very end of the age, even as we go and make disciples.

And so, are any of us sufficient for these things? I know I'm not. It seems like most of the time you get put into these situations and you're almost speechless.

And yet, the Lord can help us in those situations. Well, Jesus can do it. I know I'm not sufficient, but through Christ, I can do all things.

I can do all things. And he was the faithful and true witness. And he is with us. And so, it's not hopeless. Our hope is in Jesus Christ in this matter.

Our help is there. Our hope is there. He can, we can do this through him. We can be more than what we are now because Jesus is who Jesus is. Now, I want to tell you a story and then we'll be done.

[34 : 44] God used a lot of things to save John Bunyan. You know, John Bunyan, he's the author of Pilgrim's Progress. Well, he used a lot of things to bring John Bunyan to Jesus.

John didn't grow up in a Christian family. Not really. John didn't even grow up in an educated family. His grandfather couldn't read.

His father couldn't read. John was the first one in his family to even go to school. He didn't have a good background. Not at all.

And the Lord used different things but one thing that the Lord used was some talk of some godly peasant women. And he heard them talking about being born again.

And he heard them talking about what Christ meant to them. And he talked about them as they just, they shared the gospel with each other and talked about the trials and the victories and who Jesus is.

[35 : 47] He heard some of that conversation and he was so enchanted by what they said that he decided, here he is, he's 21, he's a young man, he loves sports, he loves games, but he's caught up and he says, oh, I want to hear more about that.

And so he sits with these women while they're doing the laundry. And they talk. And they weren't smart. They weren't smart in the world's eyes.

They weren't scholars. But you know what? They had Christ in them. And they had the wisdom of heaven resting on their souls. And as they talked, they drew John Bunyan in.

And he realized, I don't have what they have. And I want what they have. And he longed for what they had. And in a year or two, God saved him.

Now, we don't know their names. We don't know their stories. They're lost in history. But we do know this, that God used those ordinary, plain, godly women to win one of the greatest men the church has had in its history.

[36 : 59] And God used them. And the wonderful thing is, that tells me that God can use any of us. including me, including you.

So we have every reason to hear these words, and then, by faith, go and put them in practice as we keep on looking to Jesus. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you do use plain, ordinary people to do extraordinary things. That's what we are.

We thank you for your word. I pray that you would help us to be wise in the way that we act toward outsiders, and that our speech would be full of grace, seasoned with salt, that we might know how to answer everyone.

Will you be working? Would you please work in our hearts that we could put these things into practice? We want to grow in this area. We want to be more than what we are, and we thank you that we can because you are within us, and you are for us, and you love us.

[38:14] So I pray that you would please take us by the hand and teach us the way that we should go. I pray for those who don't know you. Will you show them that they too need to be born again, that they need living water, and that the Lord Jesus can give them life and can give them water and save their souls.

Show them the futility of digging their own wells and bring them to your Son, that you might be glorified, that he might be glorified. We do pray this in his name. Amen.
Amen. Amen.