

Colossians 4:2-6

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[0 : 00] This is 5 and 6 of Colossians chapter 4. Now there's a discussion that goes on amongst Christian people from time to time. And I want to simplify both sides of the argument. And of course the simplifying arguments means that you misrepresent them to some extent.

But on the one side of the argument is people will want to say evangelism is the duty of all who believe the gospel. And every believer will be taking every opportunity they can to share the news about Jesus with everyone they can.

On the other side it's said that that approach is actually unnecessary and impossible. And it's a burden to place on the consciences of all believers.

But the believer's responsibility is to live a godly life. To live the kind of life that's described in Colossians chapter 3. And so evangelism is primarily the responsibility of those gifted as evangelists. Like Paul, or Epaphras, the Jones, or many more.

You look at that kind of person and you think, well that was an evangelist. They are the ones who are primarily charged with evangelism. Now I want to say to you, both sides of the argument have a certain logic.

[1 : 26] And both sides would want to make various qualifications. Particularly the simple way that I've just stated the position. So on the one side there's the logic of the gospel itself, isn't there?

How can you believe this message and not long to tell it to everyone you meet? How can you know this great salvation and not want everyone else to know about it?

How can loving your neighbour mean anything but that? Speaking the gospel to others. It's almost the necessary outcome of believing. On the other side there's the observation that all that is said to believers in general in the New Testament, it's actually very difficult to find a direct instruction to be evangelising.

To care about evangelism, yes, definitely. To pray for evangelists. Certainly we saw that last week in John 4.3. But a word to all believers about their responsibility to be directly evangelising.

Actually it's not easy to find. So that's the context that I want to look at our words today. I'm not going to resolve that position. But I want you to come.

[2 : 49] There are different approaches in this room. I want you to come to this passage. And find, well, I think something that is more attractive or more persuasive.

So put that to one side for a moment. And let's listen to the Apostle Paul. Because for today we come to the main body of Paul's matters of Colossians. And we've got one more sermon.

But this is the end of the main body. And it's interesting that his last word, in a sense, is about Christian conduct. It's about Christian conduct towards outsiders. As he calls them.

What does he mean by that? He means people who are outside of the Christian fellowship. Outside of Christ. Outside of the church. Now, whatever side you may take in that discussion about everyone evangelising.

Let's carefully listen to Paul's words about how we as Christians are to deal with unbelievers. Let's have to take that small step back. And let's listen to what he said in the context of what we heard last time.

[3 : 56] So I'm going to read to you from verses 2 to 6. So Paul says, I'm going to continue steadfastly in prayer. Being watchful. Being alert. To all that I've told you about what is going on in Christ.

With thanksgiving. At the same time, Paul says, Pray for us. That God may open to us a door for the words. To declare the mystery of Christ. On account of which I'm in prison.

That I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak. And also walk in wisdom towards outsiders. Making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious.

Seasoned with thoughts. So that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Now it's quite to me it's important that when Paul comes to kind of close off the body of his letter. He turns his attention to the outsiders.

Chapter 4 verse 3. You'll remember he urged prayer. That God would open a door for the word. A door for Christ to be proclaimed. To those he now describes as verse 5 outsiders.

[4 : 57] The letter began in the main body of the letter. With reference to the gospel reaching those who'd been outsiders in Colossae.

It said in chapter 1 didn't it? That the gospel verse 6 is not only bearing fruit. Not only in Colossae but in the whole world.

And it was the gospel that changed the outsiders into those who were now insiders. Those who were outside of Christ now into those who believed into Christ.

And they have love for the saints and hope laid up in heaven. Those listening to this letter being read were no longer outsiders. It is an interesting term isn't it? People who are not Christians are not Christians generally.

Outsiders. And Paul uses that expression in that sense in a number of times. In a number of his letters. He wants to say there is a great difference between an insider and an outsider.

[6 : 02] Inside and outside the fellowship of God's people. God's chosen ones as they're described in this letter. In Christ and outside of Christ. In the body of Christ.

And outside the body of Christ. And that is the new way of seeing people. That is the way of seeing the whole human race according to Colossians. So we're no longer Greeks and Jews.

No longer circumcised or uncircumcised. No longer barbarian or civilian. Slave or free. But now in Christ. And the outsiders.

They're the two groups in the world. But clearly as we come to Colossians chapter 4 verse 5. This way of seeing all people in Christ. Or an outsider.

Is not intended to create a Christian ghetto. Or a monastery. Where the insiders are all cut off. And they are separated from the outsiders.

[7 : 01] It's very easy for that to happen isn't it? In fact. I think I wonder why it naturally happens. Churches develop community life. And Christians have less and less contact with the outsiders.

And so that is always naturally the way that things are going to go. And so it's very important isn't it? That we in IBC. We as a Christian community.

We work hard. We work hard at keeping as far as possible. And developing contact. And our interactions. With the outside world.

In the wider healing community. And so notice. That is the assumption that Paul says here. He assumes that you will have. And I will have contact with outsiders.

And you do. And you will. Colossians 4 verse 5. There are interactions. There are relationships. Between believers. And outsiders.

[7 : 58] And so it is. It's very important isn't it? What we're thinking about tonight. And there is. Inevitably. Some kind of distance. Some kind of barrier.

Between believers. And unbelievers. The bond of love. That the Holy Spirit. Creates. Between those people. Those who are in Christ. Inevitably.

Highlights. In our experience. Those relationships. Where there's not that bond. There's not that reality. So I have no doubt tonight. That you can think of outsiders.

You can think of people. Who you come into contact with. You may have a very close. Relationship with them. They may be your family members. They may be very good friends. They may be the people you work with.

In one way or another. They may be your neighbours. They may be the person. Who serves you coffee in the morning. There are some outsiders. Aren't there? We care deeply about. There are some outsiders.

[8 : 54] We simply have passing contact with. But whatever the case. There is a certain distance. Between us and them. Because they. Are outside.

Of Christ. Who is your life. And you. Are in Christ. What's the big reason.

For somebody not going out with. For a Christian not going out with. Somebody who's not a Christian. What's the big reason. For somebody. Who is a Christian. Not marrying an unbeliever.

The verse we always go to is. Do not be unequally yoked with. An unbeliever. I'm not absolutely convinced. That verse says. What we think it means. What's the big reason. Why is that.

Why is that such. A disastrous move. Because you. Are in Christ. Who is your life. And the other person.

[9 : 55] Is outside of Christ. Is. You don't need. A verse. You don't need. A proof text. You need to understand.

What's happened to you. In Christ. Who is your life. To grow with. To be in a relationship. To marry somebody. Who's outside of Christ. That surely. Is. Is madness.

So Paul's encouragement. To our behaviour. As I spoke to the children. Is about walking. And it's about talking. So first of all.

Let's look at your walk. Twice already. And Paul. In this letter. Paul has referred to the Christian life. As a walk. Chapter 1. And verse 10. So as to walk. In a manner.

Worthy of the Lord. For the pleasing to him. Paul's prayer is that. The Colossians. And you and I. Will be so filled. With the knowledge. Of God's will. That we would walk.

[10 : 48] In a manner. Worthy of the Lord. That we would be. Fully pleasing. To the Lord. And then in chapter 2. Verse 6. Which is really. The theme sentence. Of the letter. It says.

Therefore. As you received. Christ Jesus. The Lord. So walk in him. And it's important. To remember. What has already been said. When we think.

Of our conduct. Conduct towards outsiders. Whatever else. Needs to be said. We should remember. That our behaviour. Towards unbelievers. Must still be. Walking in a manner. Worthy of the Lord.

Fully pleasing to him. Our ways. And the way that we relate. With people who are outsiders. Who are non-Christians. Must still be. Walking in Christ Jesus. The Lord.

In other words. The character. Our behaviour. And our conduct. Which has been described. Throughout chapter 3. Of this letter. Is not suddenly to change. When we move outside. The Christian fellowship. Now I'm sorry.

[11 : 46] If that sounds like an insult. Fancy suggesting. That any of us. Would behave. In one way. Amongst our fellow Christians. And in another way.

To non-Christians. Fancy suggesting. That compassion. And kindness. And humility. And meekness. And patience. Might be more evident. In your life. Among the believers.

Than in your actions. And behaviour. And conduct. In another setting. Fancy suggesting that. But let me carry on. With the insult. Because I think. It's important.

And I think. It's worth saying. Because I think. Too often. Christian people. Display one. Kind of character. In church on Sunday.

And something. Quite different. At work on a Monday. Or perhaps. Even Saturday. Just at home. And all that has been said. About the Christian walk.

[12 : 45] In this letter. Should still be in our minds. When we come to. Colossians chapter 4. Our walk. Towards outsiders. Well what's the first bit of advice. Paul gives you. About your conduct. Towards outsiders.

Verse 5. Wisdom. Walk. In. Wisdom. Towards outsiders. What does that mean? Wisdom is practical. Wisdom is. Applied knowledge.

Wisdom is knowing. How to live. And behave. But again. Think about. What the letters. Already taught us. About wisdom. What does wisdom.

Have to do with. According to Colossians. It has to do with. The knowledge. Of God's will. What is God's will? According to Colossians. Do you remember? God's big plan.

Is to reconcile. To bring. All things. To the Lord Jesus Christ. Through his death. Indeed. Paul has said. You see. All the treasures.

[13 : 40] Of wisdom. And knowledge. Are hidden. In Christ. So wisdom. Don't misunderstand. What he says here. I think it's sometimes.

I think it's often misunderstood. Wisdom. Is not some. Some kind of. Corrective. To your Christian life. As if Paul was saying. Well it's all well and good. To be enthusiastic.

About. About the Lord Jesus. But in your dealing. With outsiders. Don't go overboard. It's the opposite. I think his meaning is. In your dealings. In the way that you.

Act towards outsiders. There will always be. Pressure to conform. There will always be. Pressure to fit in. There will always be. Pressure to win approval.

In school. And at work. And to be well thought of. You'll desperately want that. There will be great pressure. And you will need wisdom. To live out. Your knowledge of God.

[14:33] And God's will. Towards unbelievers. It will take wisdom. To live in a way. Fully pleasing to the Lord. And when you're living in contact.

And in relationships. And in dealing with unbelievers. We are to live then. With the wisdom. That is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. And certainly. That's going to be. Isn't it thinking about.

Our behaviour. And our relationships. With unbelievers. Yes it will mean. Considering the consequences. Of our conduct. But the wisdom. That we seek.

Is not the wisdom. To please. The unbelievers. Or the wisdom. To never cause. Any conflict. Or the wisdom. To never make. Any waves. Or the wisdom. To make ourselves good.

Or any other kind of wisdom. We might easily. Find ourselves seeking. No. We need wisdom. To please the Lord. In our conduct. Towards outsiders. And this will mean.

[15:28] What our translation says. Is in the end of verse 5. Making the best use. Of the time. I think that is very. Very lame. Making the best use.

Of the time. But more literally. It is buying up the time. It is much more vivid. Than making the best use. Of the time. Rise and sit full.

Watch the big breakfast. And then there was. Supermarket suite. Is it still on? Do you remember? Supermarket suite. This illustration. Slightly lost. Then. You would have.

40 seconds. And you would be able. To go around. The supermarket. And you would be able. To get as much. As you wanted. Off the shelves. During those 40 seconds. I was going to get back to that. It's what made Dale Winton.

A star. But it was. Isn't it? You were racing. Against the time. You were buying up. The time. It's a bit like. When.

[16:25] The kind of. Bargain hunter. Goes and. Goes to next. At 5 o'clock. In the morning. For the sales. You're. You're buying up. The time. You snap up. What time. You can find. Only one life.

It will soon be passed. Only what's done. For Christ. Will last. And our. Understanding. Of time. Is to shape. Our conduct.

Towards outsiders. Now. Without a. More exhortation. In verse 5. Before we move on. To verse 6. Just notice. Two things. In verse 5. Paul's emphasis.

Is on your behaviour. Generally. Paul's emphasis. Is on how. We treat people. Paul's emphasis. Is on how. We speak to people. On what we do. On what we don't do. In our dealings.

With outsiders. And that matters. And so. Before you start. Worrying about. Whether or not. You should be sharing. The gospel. With the person. Who serves you. Coffee tomorrow morning.

[17:23] Consider. How you're behaving. Are you walking. In wisdom. Wisdom. That comes. From knowing. Christ. As Lord. Make the best.

Use of the time. Bearing fruit. In every good work. And the second comment is. I don't think. I cannot think. That in this context. Paul has forgotten.

His longing. That the doors. May be open. For the word. Verse 3. He's just asked. The Colossian believers. Pray. For that.

To happen. For him. A couple of verses earlier. Verses earlier. He's asking. That he might be able. To declare. The mystery of Christ. So it would be very hard. To be praying.

For a door. To be open. For the word. In Rome. And not to be careful. And not to care. That doors are opened. For the word. In your dealings. With Colossi. As I'm not surprised.

[18:18] That the next exhortation. About general behaviour. Which Paul speaks about. Towards unbelievers. He moves. Doesn't he. To speech. Your word.

Your word. And he says. Let your speech. Let your word. Be gracious. And again. I'm a little bit unhappy.

With the way the ESV. Has done it. It's difficult. To capture it. I think. The applied bible. And the new American standard. Can help. As if we over. Translate it a little bit. It's like this. Let your word.

Let your words. Always be in grace. So do you see that? Verse 5. Walk in wisdom. Verse 6. Speak in grace.

What's the shape of your behaviour? Wisdom. What's the shape of your speech? Grace. Again. I don't think we can press.

[19:17] Paul's words. Here. To say. Well. He's saying. That we always need. To be speaking. About God's grace. I don't think he's saying that. But nor do I think. The evangelistic aspect.

Should be missed. There is an echo. Isn't there? From verse 3. To verse 6. I found this really helpful. Look at verse 3. At the same time. Pray also for us.

That God may open to us. A door. For the word. And then literally. Verse 6. Let your word. He does not say that.

Your word. Like his. Must be a clear declaration. Of the mystery of Christ. There is a difference.

Between verse 3. And verse 6. There's a difference.

Between Paul's declaring. His preaching. And. Your speaking. The believers speaking. Which I'm going to return to. In a moment. But your word.

[20 : 15] Must be with grace. Which I don't think. Paul just might be polite. There's so many links. Back to the beginning.

Of the letter. Here. And it's closed. How can we forget. What happened. When the gospel. Came to Colossae. They heard it. And they understood.

God's grace. In truth. Your speech. Then. To outsiders. Must always be shaped. By that grace. You've come.

To understand. That God. That God's grace. Affects how you speak. It even affects. What you speak. And whatever.

You're speaking about. Gracefully present. Always. So to underline. The point. He says. That your speech. Your word. Must always be seasoned. With salt.

[21 : 12] To be honest. I'm not really sure. What he means. Really. There. If you talk. If you read the commentaries. That neither are they. Very sure. And it leaves me. A bit muddled. So anyway.

Let me pass my muddle. On to you. Right. I don't think he helps. By remembering. What Jesus thought. About being the salt. Of the earth. Some people.

Want to say. What does salted speech mean? Salted speech. Meant back in the day. It was interesting. And lively. And colourful speech. That's a quote from somebody. Who's own speech. Is interesting. And lively. And colourful. And I expect that. That affected how they understood. This verse. But I think. The context. Again. Helps us. I don't think we want to build.

Too much. Into this metaphor. We're a little bit uncertain. About what it means. But in the context. Is it not. That your speech. Is flavoured. With your knowledge.

[22 : 09] Of God's grace. It will be salty. Speech. That is flavoured. With your knowledge. Of God's grace. Will be significant. It will have its effect.

It will do good. Now you'd be right. To observe. That there still has been. No direct instruction. Paul has not said to them.

Believers. You need to proclaim Christ. On every possible occasion. To every outsider. You speak to. And so can we breathe. A sigh of relief.

And think somehow. The word reaching outsiders. Is not my responsibility. Unless of course. I'm an evangelist. I'm Steve Frost. I'm a preacher. The answer to that question.

Must be no. But there is wisdom. That Paul seems to recognise. And the wisdom. That Paul seems to recognise. Is that believers.

[23 : 04] Will not be. Constant evangelists. Not all of them. His last words here. It strikes me. Are very significant.

Your conduct. And your speech. Towards outsiders. Has this purpose. See how he puts it. So that you may know. How to answer each person. Now again.

Can you notice. The shift in emphasis. From verse 4. To verse 6. In verse 4. That I may declare. In verse 3. The mystery.

Of Christ. That is how. Paul says. He ought to speak. But the believers. As. The believers. As. Behave and speak. In such a way.

That they will know. How they ought to answer. And I think. That. That. That. That. That is. Helpful to you. You. You might. Be asleep. You might be very bored. And you might think. Why is he laboring this.

[24 : 01] But I do think. It is very. Very helpful. Feat night. And it has got practical significance. And it has thrown out. By Dick Lucas. In his. Really good exposition. Of Colossians. In this little book.

And I want to quote you. A fairly lengthy section. And because of the wisdom. It conveys. I could have pitched it. And pretended that it was mine. And I often do that.

But on this occasion. I ran out of time. And so I want to share it. With you directly. We may describe. The difference. He is talking about here. In this way. Where Paul says.

This is how I ought to speak. As an apostle. As a preacher of the gospel. That I declare the mislead of Christ. And then the difference. In verse 6. That you may know. How to answer each person. So

listen to this. We may describe this difference.

By saying that. While the apostle. Looks for many opportunities. For direct evangelism. And teaching. The typical Christian. Colossae. Is to look for many opportunities. For responsive evangelism.

[25 : 00] If this distinction. Is a correct one. It immediately commends itself. By its sanity. And realism. Harm can be done. By sincere. Believing people. Who feel compelled. To preach.

And testify. To those. With whom they mix. In shop or office. Rightly aware. Of the importance. Of their message. The sad ignorance. Of many of their neighbours.

And the urgency. Of the times. They plunge in. Bravely. Whatever the temperature. But direct assault. On entrenched apathy. To change the metaphor. Is seldom successful.

And can never be carried out. By normally sensitive people. Without great cost. To nerve and confidence. And the purpose. And the purpose. Also one consequence. Of failure. Of such verbal witnessing. Is a discouragement.

Sufficiently severe. At times. To lead to disengagement. From this part of the battle. Altogether. Now Paul's advice. To the Christians. Is not along the lines. Of possessing oneself. Of better techniques.

[25 : 54] With which to approach people. Rather he turns the problem. Right around. So the Christian. 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. This. Is emphatically. Not to sound the retreat. Paul evidently. Believes. That opportunities.

For response. And explanation. Are to be found. Everywhere. Everywhere. For everyone. Is looking to discover. Answers. About life. And its meaning. And Paul evidently. Thinks.

That believing Christians. Should be found. Everywhere too. Ready to take up. These frequent opportunities. It is obvious. What strain. This removes. From conscientious Christians.

[26 : 47] The pressure. To raise certain topics. And reach certain people. Can make it difficult. To live or talk normally. In any case. We go to the office. To work. Not to evangelize.

But by being ready. And willing. To respond. The way is opened. To a more serene. And successful approach. To each day's opportunities. It opens the way too.

For a greater dependence. On God's leading. As well as for a more relevant. And sensitive witness. Suited to each individual. And remember. When the outsider. Has chosen the time.

And the place. And the subject. How wonderfully free. Is the Christian. To open his mouth. And tell the good news. Of Jesus. Doesn't that happen? What an overwhelming response.

I think that's very very good. Because it seems to me. To reflect. The Apostles Paul. Approach. The responsibilities. You and I have. So let's go back to the beginning.

[27 : 46] That simple description. That I gave you at the beginning. Of those two positions. Am I not suggesting. That you hold them. In the way that I describe them. But neither. Neither of those. Is an adequate position.

Is it? To think that evangelism. Is just the responsibility. Of the evangelist. But no one else. So let's leave it to them. And Christian people. And get on with these.

Christian people. And get on with these. Christian people. And I'll get it. That obviously isn't right. But neither I suspect. Is it right. To lay the responsibility. Of the evangelist. On every Christian person.

Irrespective of gifts. And personalities. And opportunities. And so walk in wisdom. This week. Towards outsiders. Making the best use of the time.

Let your speech. Always be gracious. Seasoned with salt. So that you may know. How you ought to answer each person. Let's pray.