

Interacting with Lost People

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Date: 21 July 2024

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[0 : 00] If you'll open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 4. Colossians chapter 4, you can use your phone, you can use your Bible, you can use other device, or you can grab a Bible out of the pew.

And in the pew, just so you know, it's going to be page 1170. So don't use that in another Bible because that probably wouldn't work. We're here at the end of Colossians.

Colossians chapter 4, verse 5 and 6 is what we're going to look at today. And we'll read the passage and pray and jump right in. Here's what the word of the Lord says.

Walk in wisdom toward 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. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for how clear, how powerful, how strong your word is. And in the next few moments together, Lord, as we look at this and try to understand what it's saying and what it means for our lives, I pray.

[1 : 17] I pray that by your spirit, you would illuminate our minds to understand, that by your spirit, you would give us faith that we might believe what we see. And then by your spirit, you would empower us so that we could live out what your word says.

Help us, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. First time I ever drove a truck pulling some sort of low boy or trailer, I was about 22 years of age.

I had never pulled a trailer in my life. I had never backed. Okay. So here we go. Say that with me. Okay. Scripture interprets scripture. So we start with Paul himself.

And we look at the scriptures that he wrote to get an understanding of the word wisdom. And in chapter 1, verse 9 through 10, it's one of the first times he uses the word wisdom in the book of Colossians.

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, verse 10, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

[2 : 28] Now, let me just pause there. He's telling them what he's praying for them. And his prayer for them is that they're filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

They need to know the will of God. In other words, he's saying that there's knowledge out there of what God thinks and what God wants. He wants them to know that, have this spiritual understanding, so they can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to God, bearing fruit in every good work, and then also increasing in their knowledge of God.

In other words, they needed to know their Bibles so well that every time they walked a step, they just oozed Bible all over the place.

Do you understand what I'm saying? Filled with all, because here's the thing. Wisdom is taking the biblical truths that are there and living them out. It's skill in applying the word of God to life.

A lot of people try to apply the word to all kinds of things, and it's pretty scary sometimes what happens. But there's this wisdom that's from God. But there's another kind of wisdom that Paul talks about in Colossians, chapter 2, verse 23, where he says, these indeed have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they have no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

[4 : 00] In other words, there are things out there that people are going to tell you that you ought to do if you want to grow as a Christian, and it's going to appear to be the kind of wisdom we're talking about here.

It's going to look like it's right. It's going to sound like it's right. You might not be spiritually mature enough to even discern the difference between the two. But Paul is saying, listen, that kind of worldly wisdom is not going to help you fight against your sin.

So he says that they are to walk then in this wisdom, and this wisdom is this ability to use the scriptures, the biblical truths that are there, to take and make application of.

That's why we have the books of like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, because they take biblical truth, and they put them into everyday life. How do you live this out, right? So to walk in wisdom is to live out biblical truth.

Now, I want to give you one example, all right? One example. In the Old Testament, we know that one of the names of God is Jehovah Shalom, right?

[5 : 08] Jehovah Shalom. It means the Lord God of peace, right? The Lord of peace. He's the Lord of peace. He has peace. He brings peace.

He gives peace. Peace comes from him. He's the one who has the peace. Now, that biblical truth, Paul the Apostle leans on that biblical truth to make personal application of it in the lives of the Philippians.

Because in Philippians chapter 4, verse 6 through 7, he tells them that they should not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. In other words, Paul the Apostle takes the Old Testament biblical truth of Jehovah Shalom and applies it to your anxious heart.

And says, here's what you do. You pray. You don't sit there and your navel gaze about all your anxious little thoughts and let them just run rampant in your head. Stop your mind. Stop listening to yourself and start talking to God and say to the Lord, Lord, help me out.

[6 : 17] So that's what I'm saying. Biblical wisdom is when you take biblical truth and you apply it to everyday life. Sometimes we misapply. So we have to go back to the scriptures, go to the writers of the New Testament.

They help us a ton making these applications. So what he's saying then is that you need to live the Bible out in front of lost people.

Full stop. Think about that. What a novel concept. Really, it's not that difficult. You already knew this before you came in here this morning, right? If you say you're a Christian, then how you live your life matters.

And if you say you're a Christian and the Bible says certain things, you ought to live certain things. And you ought to live it out whether it's Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Friday, Saturday, right?

You should live the same every single day. And so in front of lost people, the most important thing he says here in this beginning thing is to walk in wisdom.

[7 : 21] He goes on to say to make the best use of the time. Now that's what the ESV says. ESV says making the best use of the time. The King James says redeeming the time.

Redeeming the time. The idea is that every moment is precious and costly. Because once a moment is gone, we can never get it back.

So what he's wanting us to do is he's encouraging Christians as they walk in wisdom toward outsiders to do it under the umbrella of not wasting your life.

Not wasting your resources. Not wasting your energies. Not wasting your time. But to do things that are of eternal significance.

Use your time well because you only have so much of it. Basically, Paul is against passivity. Passivity.

[8 : 24] Paul wants them to actively pursue knowing and living and teaching the gospel and all of these truths in their lives out in front of lost people.

Because just as you cannot grow spiritually through osmosis, you cannot reach the lost through passivity. It'll never happen.

And what this means is that you've got to understand that there's a lot more lost people around you than you recognize. You know, one time Billy Graham was on TV. He was being interviewed. And he said that it was in his estimation, and this is back in the 60s, 70s, 80s, somewhere in there, it was his estimation that 85% of church members were actually lost people.

85%. You understand that in a room of 50 people, that means 42 of you he would consider to be lost and only 8 of you saved. Now, I'm not saying that Billy Graham is right.

But he's not the only one who said something like that. A.W. Criswell, famous pastor of First Baptist Church Dallas, as he looked at his congregation, First Baptist Church Dallas, made the statement that he would be surprised if he saw 25% of the members in heaven.

[9 : 45] What I'm saying is that we don't need to be passive and just sort of get ourselves in this sort of negligent mindset that says that as we see people that morally look like us, then, oh, we don't have to do anything with the gospel.

We've already won the fight here. And he says, no. We have to wake up and use every single day for the work of the gospel. Every single day.

You may come across somebody who's lost entirely. They've never heard the gospel and they need to hear the gospel that day. You may come across somebody who's heard the gospel, but they've never prayed to receive Christ and they just need someone to be praying for them that day.

You may come across a young Christian who's immature in their faith. They need the gospel too. They need that gospel to encourage them and they need someone to do the kingdom work of encouraging them. Or you may come across a Christian who's living in sin and needs you to chastise them for living in that sin.

That's all kingdom work. And Paul is saying, don't miss the opportunities that are always, always, always in front of us. He says we are to live, to walk in this wisdom toward outsiders.

[11 : 02] We cannot be the kind of person that comes to worship on Sunday and acts one way, but then when we get to the job, we act it a different way. Let me just put it this way.

If you would be embarrassed for your pastor to go to work with you, then you probably ought to repent. Because I'm not the one you should worry about.

Because I don't ever go with you. And a half of things that people say, I don't even understand. But Jesus knows it all. He's always there. And here's the thing.

If you begin to live Saturday like you do Sunday, Monday like you do Sunday, if Sunday and your commitment to Christ on Sunday pervades the rest of your week and the rest of your time, it will paint a target on your back.

And the world lost people around you are not going to look at you living biblical wisdom and going like, oh, I'm so proud of you for living biblical wisdom. That's not going to happen. You're going to run contrary to the world around you, and it will put a target on your back.

[12 : 06] Did you know that the early church, the early church, one commentator tells us this, that they were called, Christians were called atheists. They were called atheists because they didn't believe in the little statue gods.

Christians were called unpatriotic because they wouldn't burn incense to the image of the Caesar, the emperor. They were called immoral because of necessity they would meet behind locked doors. Christians were called cannibals because they ate the Lord's Supper, representing his body and his blood. But in other words, biblical wisdom is how we're supposed to live in front of lost people, yet it's going to put the crosshairs on us.

And you need to be prepared and ready for that. That's why 1 Peter, he says this, he says, but even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.

[13 : 30] Have it a good conscience so that when you are slandered by those who revile your good behavior in Christ, they may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good if it should be God's will than for doing evil.

So you're to walk in wisdom toward outsiders. But the question is this, how do you do that? How, what steps do you need to take to get to where you're walking in wisdom toward outsiders?

I got a couple of things for you. Number one, you got to know the scriptures. Sometimes I feel like a broken record player.

I've been in ministry for 30 something years, and I cannot tell you there's, that there's a time in any sort of teaching sermon or something that I haven't said this.

Because it's just true. And I know it's hard to read the Bible for yourself. I know there's lots of things that come in the way.

[14 : 37] I know there's a lot about life that gets in the way sometimes. But if you're to live out biblical truth, you got to know biblical truth. And to know biblical truth, you got to have the word of

God saturating your life.

And here's the first and most important thing to do with the scriptures. If you do nothing else with the scriptures, this one thing can make all the difference in the world. Are you ready for it? Never miss the sermon.

If you didn't have a Bible in your home, and you didn't have a device that you could read the Bible, guess what? You would be just like the early church. And God grew them.

Because of why? Because of the preaching of the word. If you miss anything, then miss your quiet time Monday morning. But by every ounce of strength in your body, don't miss the preaching of the word on Sunday.

If you go on vacation, that's great. Go and find a church to go to. Because God uses the preaching of the word to grow his people.

[15:47] Get involved in the preaching of the word. Yes, we live in a blessed time. You've got scriptures in your house. If you've got one device, then you've got access to probably 300 different versions of the Bible.

There's no reason we shouldn't be reading the Bible as well and being involved in the studies. The second thing you need to do is you need to live out these truths. As you understand it, apply it to your life and live it out.

That takes the power of the Holy Spirit in you to do that. You can't just pull yourself up by your bootstraps and do that. But listen, it ought to affect everything in your life, right? How you handle your marriage, how you handle your parenting, your free time, your finances, your frustrations with your job, your work ethic, your political life, your choices of people that you freely associate with. If Jesus does not affect who your friends are and how you treat them, then why are you following Jesus? If Jesus does not affect how you use your free time and your money, then what are you doing with the word that's preached?

If Jesus does not affect how you act when you endure suffering, then what are you doing following Jesus? What are you doing following Jesus?

[17:09] And you got to live it out. Let's talk about the second thing. The second thing is not just to walk in wisdom, but it's to speak with grace. You'll notice verse six again, Colossians four.

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

Now here's what I find fascinating. Verse five talks about your conduct. Verse six talks about your mouth. Right? What you do and what you say. Both are important. Okay?

Second thing is gracious speech. Gracious speech. Now what is gracious speech? Well, we could go back in Colossians chapter three, verse 16. And I think this kind of gives us a little bit here with this.

He says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

[18:09] In other words, Paul is saying that what we speak ought to be scripture here. So there's something about gracious speech that involves the scriptures. And he writes the same, writes something similar over in Ephesians chapter four, verse 29, when he says, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

So gracious speech is that which is built upon the word, which also then gives grace to others. Let me tell you a couple of things that gracious speech is not. Grace is, gracious, I can't even say it now.

Gracious speech, I still can't even say it right. Anyway, speech with grace is not abusive. In Titus chapter three, verse two, it says, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy toward all people, to somebody else.

Being a quarrelsome person, being someone without gentleness, that is not gracious speech. It cannot be vindictive or getting even. First Peter chapter two, verse 23, says that we should not revile when we're reviled.

We're supposed to follow the example of Christ who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return. But then also, gracious speech is not corrupt. Ephesians 5, 4, says, let there be no filthiness or foolish talking or crude joking.

[19 : 38] Let's just stop there for a second. Let there be no filthiness, vulgarity, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, that crassness that's there.

It's out of place. It's out of place for a believer. But instead, there's to be thanksgiving. You see, gracious speech cannot speak this way, that's a Monday or Saturday speaking, and this way, that's a Sunday speaking.

It's got to be consistent. And the consistency is that gracious speech is truthful and loving. Look at Ephesians chapter four, verse 15. Rather speak the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ.

We're to speak the truth in love. And here's our problem. Our problem is either that we speak the truth and we have no love for the person we're speaking the truth to.

So that truth comes across with harshness and the content of that truth is just never heard. Or we speak with nothing but love and we have no truth and we let people get away with all manner of silliness.

[20 : 52] We have to speak the truth in love together. The two ought to be together. And if you go back to Ephesians 4.29, he says that this is for the building up. In other words, gracious speech is that which I speak built upon the word of God that builds you up so that I'm speaking the truth in love to you, right?

So that gracious speech, if I were to preach right here and I were to just sort of slam you and say, I can't believe you people, you are just a bunch of blah, blah, blahs, that would not be speaking the truth in love.

That would not be gracious speech. But if I'm telling you something that's true and though it might not be very pleasant to hear it and it kind of hurts your feelings a little bit, that doesn't mean I didn't speak the truth in love.

Because sometimes the truth hurts. I don't need to try to use it to hurt you, but we need to speak the truth in love. He says we're supposed to have this gracious speech.

Well, what he does then is he illustrates that by saying that it needs to be seasoned with salt. It needs to be seasoned with salt. When was the last time somebody told you to salt your words?

[22 : 06] Because in our day and age, having salty words is not really a good thing, is it? Well, it wasn't in Paul's time either. The pagans of his time used to say that they were gracious in their speech and it was seasoned with salt.

And what they meant by that is exactly what you think it means, right? It's that saltiness, that sassiness, that crassness, that sort of cutting, biting, sarcastic sort of way of dealing with others. Paul is grabbing that and yanking it out of the pagan world and saying, no, really, we do need to talk with salt. And I think he's leaning also upon Jesus and Jesus' example of saying that we're the salt of the earth.

That the way we talk as salt keeps things from going bad and as salt makes things taste better and as salt can heal up that which has a wound of some kind.

So our words as Christians ought to be for the healing giving a flavor of heaven as we speak. Let me just say it this way.

[23 : 11] When you get through talking, are people more or less drawn to Christ? I mean, you can talk about the weather, you can talk about politics, you can talk about your IRA, you can talk about your tomato plants, you can talk about whatever you want to talk about, but when you get through talking, do you talk in such a way that people are more drawn to Christ or less drawn to Christ?

All of your words, they are to be directed for the sake of the kingdom. Paul goes on to say that we need to do this, we need to have this salted speech so we know how to answer each person because not every person who talks to us should we answer them in the same way.

You might have somebody who comes to you and says, you know, why do you go to church every Sunday? And they ask you such a question and they're sincere and they really want to know, they really want to understand your heart.

Well, you'll need to answer them in one way, but somebody who comes up to you and they say the same thing but their whole intention is to mock you, to put you down, you need to answer them differently and in both ways it should represent Christ.

Here's the thing, we as Christians are to speak with grace, seasoned with salt and what this brings up is the connection that oftentimes we fail to see.

[24 : 36] What comes out of your mouth, what comes out of your mouth demonstrates what's in your heart. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 15, do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. Your speech in general reveals your heart.

Your speech then toward outsiders ought to be all that God wants it to be. And the only way for you to speak in such a way with grace and the salt of God is for you to have a heart change.

If out of your mouth comes complaining and boasting and cursing and anger and malice and lies and gossip and slander, it's not because somebody else's fault that twisted your arm or that made you mad.

[26 : 01] It's because that came right out of your own heart. And in order to quit those things, there has to be a heart change. And so what you need to do then is this.

You need to first and foremost as a Christian yield every single word of your mouth to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He died upon the cross not just to purchase a ticket to heaven for you, but he died on the cross to purchase you, to own you.

He bled for your mouth. He bled for your words. He purchased every single word that comes out of your mouth. And we must have a heart fully committed surrendering every word that we speak to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Now if you think about that for just a minute, you're going to be tempted to find a loophole. You're going to be tempted to justify certain ways that you use your words.

And I would say to you, stop it. Let the truth of this hit you. Every word belongs to Christ.

[27 : 30] That's why Jesus said that we will be judged for every careless word we say. Your mouth is not yours.

It belongs to Christ. The second thing is in order to speak the truth, you've got to know the truth. We come back to that again and I'll just say one little small thing.

Let me just put you in the situation. You've gone to the mailbox and your neighbor young family.

Mom comes walking out to the mailbox. She looks frazzled. You say, hi, how are you doing?

And you don't really want her to say very much because that's the way we do. Hi, how are you doing? Please don't actually tell me. But she tells you and she unloads just a little bit about how to the end of all of her wits she is because of her children, marriage, life, things are difficult.

would you even try to say something? Do you know what to say? Because your mouth doesn't belong to you, it belongs to Christ.

[28 : 39] So what would Jesus say to her? You see, that's what we're getting at. If we're interacting with lost people, we're interacting with people for the sake of the kingdom, we need to interact in such a way as to say that which Jesus would say.

Do you know the word of God well enough to say what Jesus would say in that moment? Because you see, you cannot sit there and just hope that some strike of lightning is going to hit you and you'll have words.

Because if you've never studied the word of God, you don't have the revelation of God in you, you will have nothing to say to them. You need to know the word.

And you need to know how to talk to other Christians just as much as you need to talk to lost people. You see, here's the thing. Christians need the gospel just as much as lost people need the gospel.

The gospel is not just a gateway into the Christian life, but the gospel is the air we breathe of the Christian life. And so even Christians need to be reminded that they need to speak with grace and salt to other Christians.

[29 : 50] Christians. It means that you've got to not only watch the things you say, but you've got to watch your tone of voice and your paraverbals and your nonverbals. Speaking with rolling eyes and dripping sarcasm.

Speaking with disdain and frustration and weariness and crashiness or vulgarity to other Christians. Your mouth was purchased with the perfect blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and to speak with impatient tones as though someone is an idiot who's talking to you is not at all honoring to Christ with your mouth.

And when lost people hear you say that to another Christian, when lost people hear you talk that way to another Christian, why would they ever want to have anything that you have?

And maybe, just maybe, several of these things that I've said this morning kind of puts you in this place of going like, man, I got this wrong and I got this wrong and I got this wrong.

I mean, we start talking about the mouths, every one of us. If I were to ask the question, how many of you have sinned with your mouth in the last 24 hours, every hand should probably go up, including mine.

[31 : 09] And if you think that yours shouldn't, then you're probably lying to yourself. you have to do that. And so what do we do with that? You have to remember this, that not only has he purchased your mouth, but he has paid your debt.

And so over the last two weeks, the times that you have failed to use your mouth the right way, the times that you have failed to walk in wisdom the way you ought to, the times that you haven't bought up the time and used your time well the way you should have, all the times that you look back now, hearing what I'm saying here from the word, you look back and you kind of go like, man, I missed it, I missed it, I missed it, I missed it, I missed it, I missed it.

You need to hear this truth and you need to hear it loud and clear. Christ has already paid the price for every one of those. He's already paid the price for every one of those.

Maybe it was last night in a heated moment between you and your spouse and the anger just flared and flashed and you said things that you wished you could take back. I'm telling you right now that that has been paid for under the blood of Christ.

And so today, run to him. Run to him. Being forgiven. Being washed clean. What can wash away our sins?

[32 : 38] Nothing but the blood of Jesus. May we walk in wisdom and speak with grace. May we walk in wisdom and speak with grace.