

Don't Forget to Add Salt!

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to that passage in Colossians that we read earlier, and looking at verses 5 and 6, especially this morning. Colossians chapter 4, verses 5 and 6.

Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech be gracious always, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. If you watch MasterChef or any such program, you'll realize that very often those who take part are sometimes criticized by the judges for not having seasoned the food properly.

I will say there's not enough salt in it, you haven't added salt to it, or words to that effect. Salt, of course, is basic to the flavoring or the seasoning of our food.

You can, of course, have too much of it, so we're told, but if you don't have any at all, then obviously it's a very bland plate of food. And the Bible uses the imagery of salt in different ways.

[1 : 17] Salt was very precious in olden times, in fact, so precious that it was quite expensive if it wasn't freely available. And that was because, of course, it was used as a preservative.

Long before the days of frozen foods and other means of preservation of food, you had to rely on salt. It was a very precious commodity for that reason, as well as others.

And the Bible uses salt symbolically to be an image for us or a picture for us of important spiritual or moral truths that it sets out for us.

And this is one passage where you find the Bible actually using salt in order to convey to us something very important in terms of our conduct as Christians, and particularly so in regard to our speech, the quality of our speech.

Now, in verses 5 and 6 here, you find the apostle really dividing it into, first of all, a general reference to our conduct. In verse 5, conduct yourselves wisely, or literally it says walk in wisdom towards those who are outside.

[2 : 32] Outside, that's those who are outside of the church, making the best use of the time. But then it comes to focus in verse 6 more narrowly upon our speech, because our speech is such a vital part of how we relate to one another, and also to other people who may be outside of the church.

And that's why he's saying here, holding these two things together, the general reference to conduct, conducting ourselves wisely in wisdom, walking in wisdom.

But then he narrows the focus to our speech. Let your speech always be gracious, or with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person, or that you may answer each person appropriately.

Let's look at the two verses, looking at them that way. Firstly, the general reference, we can call that public conduct, and then the more specific one, purity of speech, in verse 6.

So, public conduct and purity of speech. He says here, continue or conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders. Walk in wisdom is the literal way that it's set out for us, but you notice it's saying to outsiders.

[3 : 50] That's to those who are not here now in the church, who are not yet in the church. That's how we should look at it. Who are outsiders because they're outside the pale, or the borders of the church.

We'll see in a minute who the church are. But this is what is particularly concerned, Paul is particularly concerned, how these Christians in Colossae relate to outsiders.

He said plenty about how they have to relate to each other, the kind of life they must have within the church, how they actually have their relationships set out. And he's spoken about that in terms of wives, husbands, children, owners of slaves, slaves, all of that sort of stuff that was current at the time.

He's saying this is how things are, so this is how you must be to each other. This is how you must treat each other. You are Christians. You follow Christ as your example. But now he's moving to those outside, and how we conduct ourselves in relation to outsiders.

So he says walk in wisdom. Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders. Now that's an important element in itself in our New Testament teaching.

[4 : 58] Because you'll find, for example, in Peter, we'll come back to the passage again, but just to mention it just now, 1 Peter 3, verse 16 there, talks about how they are to be setting out their defense or their account of what they are as Christians, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

In other words, Peter is concerned that they actually speak in a proper fashion as Christians, even to those who slander them, even to those who abuse them, even to those who don't have much good to say about them, who say things wrongly about them, who misrepresent them.

Nevertheless, Peter is saying, just as Paul is saying here, conduct yourselves wisely, properly, fittingly, to those who are outside. Indeed, it's a qualification of the eldership.

In 1 Timothy 3, verse 7, it's a qualification of those who would be elected as elders in the church, that they have to have a good reputation of those who are outside.

In other words, anybody who is in the church and is constantly bickering with their neighbors or getting into disputes of that kind or not using language fittingly towards people outside, that Paul is saying to Timothy, that's not the kind of person that you want to have in the eldership of the church.

[6 : 31] They must have a good reputation to those who are outside, with those who are outside.

So you see, that's all saying to us that the kind of view you sometimes come across that says, well, the world is not going to really like the church anyway.

Those who are outside the church there, they're not going to actually like the things the church stands for and the things the church is saying and the things the church is doing. So you then get some people saying the conclusion from that is, well, the world is going to hate you anyway.

So really, it's not all that important as to what they think of you as Christians. It is. Because the gospel and the integrity of the gospel is tied up with the integrity of God's people.

And our conduct, as Paul is saying here, although it's a very narrow focus, but an important one even on the speech, but as he's talking here in general terms first, our conduct must have the aim of the world actually thinking well of the church.

Now, it's not always going to happen. You know that very well. It's not always going to be the case that even if you stand true to what you believe and present it lovingly and tactfully and in whatever way the Bible counsels you to do, it doesn't mean that everybody out there is actually going to accept that and no longer going to speak badly of you.

[7 : 57] But still, it is the case generally that most people out there in society who don't belong to the church, they respect integrity when they see it. They respect if you're true to your beliefs.

What they don't respect is if you believe one thing and then do something else contrary to it. If you say you believe certain things from the Bible as to how you speak and then you speak differently to that, that's not going to be respected or gain us respect.

And what Paul is concerned for is that those who are outside have a proper view of the church, whatever they make of it, whatever they then say about it, let it never be said, Paul is saying, that they actually think of you as inconsistent to what you believe.

Conduct yourselves wisely to those who are outside because not only is our aim as the people of God, as a congregation of God's people, as individuals who belong to the church, not only is our aim to conduct ourselves wisely or with wisdom to those who are outside so that as far as possible they have respect for what we believe and what we do and what we say, but you want those outside to actually come inside.

Your concern is that those who are presently outside, through the witness of the gospel and your witness to the gospel and the testimony that you bear to God, by God's blessing and grace, they will no longer be outsiders, that they will come to be insiders like yourselves.

[9 : 31] That's really what the work of evangelism is about. That's what the aim of witnessing to Christ is about, that outsiders become insiders. And therefore, we conduct ourselves wisely to them.

Now, what does it mean that the church is to be like this towards those who are outside? Who are the church? What is the church? The church is all of you today here in this building.

It doesn't just mean those who are communicants. It doesn't just mean those who take communion every time the Lord's Supper comes around. The church is comprised of baptized members and communicant members.

And together, that's the visible church. That's the church that people see. That's the church that gathers here to worship God. That's the church that together seeks the Lord's blessing on our lives. So we're all being addressed by this particular injunction. Not just ministers, elders, deacons, communicants.

[10:41] Paul is writing to the church at Colossae. And he's saying to the church at Colossae, it's important how you relate to those outside with the aim of them coming to be insiders.

conduct yourselves wisely towards those who are outside. Too often in the history of the church, and we're not leaving ourselves out of that, too often we haven't had respect because we haven't acted rightly or spoken rightly.

and we have to hold about hands when we know that and say, I got that wrong. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't have done it in that way or said it in that way.

And so we want to conduct ourselves in wisdom, to walk in wisdom, to be godly men and women, young and old, towards those who are outside.

And then he says, making the best use of the time. And that again is more traditionally in the older versions translated, redeeming the time. It actually means literally rescuing something from being lost.

[12:04] And what it's really saying about our time is that whatever time we have available to it, we have to rescue it from being lost. In other words, we have to use to the best advantage for God and for his cause.

We have to rescue it from being lost in terms of not wasting it. That doesn't mean you don't have times for relaxation or recreation or holidays or look after yourself properly so that you're giving yourself proper rest.

It doesn't mean any of that at all, but it means that you're redeeming the time, that the time you have available is time that you are devoting, whether you're resting or whether you're active, to God and to his service and to his cause.

And you know, there's something else quite important about that because Ephesians 5.16 has the same thing, but it has a few additional words which are very important. Redeeming the time because the days are evil.

Because the days are evil. Paul was very aware of the evil around him, of the enmity shown to the gospel and to the church and to the people of God.

[13:11] And that's why walking in this way towards outsiders was so important. Redeeming the time, recovering the time, rescuing the time from being lost so that it's not flittered away on something that does not come to glorify God and be of advantage to his cause.

And in fact, the more evil the times, the more advantage it is to us as Christians to conduct ourselves wisely to outsiders.

Our times then and our opportunities then, when there is an increase in the darkness around the church, our opportunities then become more precious, more powerful, more meaningful in terms of rescuing the time for God and using the time for God.

Conduct yourselves wisely. Walk in wisdom because he's saying that you may know how you ought to answer each person is at the end of the next verse but that's one aspect of why we need the wisdom and need the wisdom from God.

That's really what this is about. We haven't got time to go into that aspect of it but obviously from the Bible elsewhere, from Paul writing elsewhere and other aspects of the scripture as well, you know that the wisdom that we need is the wisdom that's from God, the wisdom that's from above, the wisdom that by God's grace he fills our hearts with and our minds with, the wisdom by which we're informed by God himself through his truth, how to conduct ourselves towards those who are outside.

[15:04] Walk in wisdom, walk in the wisdom that you can get from God, pray to God for that wisdom as James says, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God because we don't have the wisdom ourselves to walk in the proper way towards those who are outside.

We need that wisdom but we can only get it from God. It doesn't matter what natural talents or abilities we have, what our intellectual prowess might be or otherwise or even if we think we don't

have any of that at all.

God's wisdom is not dependent on that. He will give us the wisdom. We need to ask him for it constantly, daily. Walk wisely.

Think about God's honor, God's glory. Think about his cause, think about the damage that wrong words do. Walk wisely towards those who are outside.

And then he says, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt God, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Well, salted speech, and again of course this includes very much those who are outsiders towards outsiders.

[16:13] That's the context as we've said which he's writing this. But he's saying here, let your speech always be gracious or with grace is literally what it says. So there's a hint there that the grace we need, the strength we need is actually from God to enable us to speak as we ought to speak.

And yet the word gracious is very important. Conduct yourselves in this way, speaking graciously to people. Again, if you go back to 1 Peter, the passage I mentioned, in chapter 3, verse 8, for example, there says, finally all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless. And then he says in verses 13 to 16, even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, have no fear of them, nor be troubled.

In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, prepare to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason of the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior may be put to shame.

You see, the context there is the same. Let your speech here be gracious, even when you are answering those who are against you, those who oppose you, those who don't like what you stand for, do it with grace, do it with gentleness, do it with respect, follow the pattern of the Lord himself, who when he was reviled did not revile again, who when he was threatened he did not respond in kind.

[17:54] And that's why he says here, seasoned with salt. Now there are two properties, or three properties, you might say, that salt has.

Three main properties, you might say. Salt preserves, salt can be used for cleansing, and salt also is used for flavoring.

So you've got the three, the preserving, the cleansing, and the flavoring. And that's all built into you. You take these qualities or properties of salt with you and just feed that into your thoughts and your understanding of the text here, which says, let your speech be gracious, seasoned with salt.

In other words, that's what he's saying. Your speech has to be, as salt is, used as a preserving, used as a cleansing, used as a flavoring to society and to the life of other people.

And that means it has a two-fold application. And it's saying here, seasoned with salt, it has a two-fold application. Think of these three properties of salt, preserving, cleansing, flavoring.

[19:07] That has to be applied in a spiritual and moral sense, just like in the Sermon on the Mount, you have, you are the salt of the earth. Same thing, the salt of the earth here, your speech being seasoned with salt.

The first part of the application is that you're seeking to prevent decay in society. The more you leave society without the truth of God, the more decay sets in.

You can see that when the Bible is taken out of people's lives, what happens? You find spiritual and moral decay setting in. You find lives that increasingly come to be out of sync with the word of God, with the will of God.

So you and I are actually charged by God as people who are worshippers of God, who are the church of God in the world, to be a means of stopping that decline, of stopping that rot, of stopping that corruption, of standing so that that is, as far as possible, prevented in our society.

But the other side of it is also important. Not only do you actually act as a Christian seeking to prevent the rot in society, you're also promoting righteousness in society.

[20:23] It's not just preventing something happening, it's also making something very much to be the case. You're promoting righteousness at the same time as you're preventing rottenness.

you're acting as salt. You've both the preservative and the flavoring of the enhancement of human life in you as a Christian.

And that comes across very much in the passages we read actually, 1 Peter chapter 3 and at verse 9 there, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless.

Same thing in Romans 12. You can look up the passage later in Romans 12 verses 14 to 21. Paul is not saying anything different to Peter because what they're saying is it's not enough for us not to be using bad speech.

It's not enough for us not to be reviling. You have to go to the other side of things too. As well as not reviling, as well as not using bad speech, you've got to be using wholesome speech a wholesome life.

[21 : 35] Don't revile, he says, on the contrary, bless, and that's a positive thing. Let your speech be always seasoned with salt. Don't forget to add the salt.

That's the title of our study today. Don't forget to add the salt. Don't let your Christian life be bland. God's love. John Stott has in his writings a description of what he calls rabbit hole Christians. Rabbits are like they come out of their burrows, they scurry about with other rabbits, and then at the threat of danger they scurry back into their bolt holes again. He calls them rabbit hole Christians because what he says is that you come across some Christians and really all they're concerned for each day of their lives is they come out of their homes or come out of whatever and they meet with other Christians and all through the week they talk about what a great week they've had. They've met this Christian and that Christian. They have a great time speaking to other Christians and Stott says, is that all there is to life? Is that all there is to the Christian life? Are we happy at the end of a week because we've met with all of these other Christians and not spoken a word to people who are outside a church?

You see, we can't be salt in society. We can't actually be a means under God of preventing rot in society or promoting righteousness in society as the two things go together without interacting with that society.

[23 : 08] People in the past and still in some cases think the best thing is just to withdraw from society. You join some group of monks or similar to that somewhere, you cloister yourself off, you follow in your own private devotions, reading and understanding the word of God, you engage with prayers inside that safe environment, you never see the world.

That's not what New Testament Christianity is about. It's about being salt and in the old days when you needed salt as a preservative, especially for chunks of meat, you actually had to make sure you rubbed it in before it actually was set aside to be preserved.

that's how it is in society. That doesn't mean you act brusquely. Remember it says conduct yourselves wisely, let your speech be gracious. You don't actually bully people into believing things that you believe.

You don't act in a way that just roughly or in a way that says, well here it is, take it or leave it, this is what I believe and you've got to believe it as well. Tact, consideration, understanding, compassion, patience, love.

That's what you find in the passage, isn't it? Love which binds everything together, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. And in that way, and other things we could say too, your speech is to be seasoned with salt in such a way that you are able to answer those who ask you, who interact with you daily, that they see something of Christ through your words, through how you speak, through your phraseology even.

[24 : 57] It's not enough that we don't use coarse speech. Of course, that's important. And more than that, we have to use sound speech, speech that builds people up, that encourages people, that instructs people, that brings truth to people, that interacts in that way with those who are outside.

And that joins with the wisdom that I mentioned in verse 5 of the chapter. Somebody was once on a cruise up the fjords in Norway, and looking at the mountains with all the snow gathered up on the top, the huge chunks of snow up there.

He asked the guide, once they'd come ashore and were on a journey somewhere near that, he asked the guide, do you often get avalanches here? Yes, he says, at times of the year, there are conditions in the mountains there that that snow that you're seeing up there just now, one word could actually bring it all down.

If he just shouted out one word, the echo of that would make that huge volume of snow just create an avalanche.

And isn't it like that in our lives too? How many avalanches have been caused by one word wrongly spoken, by speech not seasoned with salt, by words that were not gracious, that were spoken by people like myself in the way they should not have been?

[26 : 41] And as I said, in regard to the pastoral note, the brief note I've issued today, our circumstances in providence today make it all the more imperative that our speech is seasoned with salt, always gracious with grace.

And especially to outsiders, so that we don't have any additional avalanches coming on top of us. A word in conclusion about Christians to Christians. This is really to outsiders, but like everything else of the kind, it begins in the church and what we're like inside.

We're not going to be what we should be to those who are outside unless and accept we are what we should be to one another. And you know yourselves how Jesus instructed his disciples as to how they were to be in relation to each other and how Paul here in his writings in Colossae as well, no less, he talks about how they are to be in the relationships one with another.

That's given prominence because that's where it starts. What we are in the church, what we are as the church, what we are to each other, is in many ways what determines what we will be to those who are outsiders.

[28 : 01] Now in Mark chapter 9, verse 50, Jesus said this to the disciples. Remember, they were bickering, they were disputing who was the greatest among them. And Jesus said, Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. another. In other words, he was saying to them, as salt is essential for preserving and cleansing and flavoring, let your speech to each other be like that.

Have salt in yourselves or among yourselves and be at peace with each other. Now there's the challenge for me today as an individual Christian.

the fact that I stand in a pulpit doesn't in any way make any difference to this. I have to be a Christian first and foremost in my speech, in my speech at home, in my speech in public, wherever I am.

In that sense, I'm in exactly the same category as yourselves. And we have to put to each other today these challenging but important questions. today am I concerned that my speech will preserve?

[29 : 17] Will I preserve the good things of the gospel? Will I preserve love? Will I preserve faith? Will I preserve hope? Will I be like that to my fellow Christians?

Is my speech today one that cleanses? Am I concerned to do away with the rottenness of sin? And when I come across it, am I concerned to speak in such a way that really addresses us that even sometimes, if it may mean something of a rebuke, if I do it in love, as the psalmist said, it will not break my head, it will prove to be refreshing oil.

Matthew Henry somewhere says, if we really genuinely desire to be holy, then part of that will include that we desire to have our faults pointed out that we may deal with them.

That's a difficult thing. But if you want to be holy and I want to be holy, you're not going to say to somebody who lovingly says, can I help you with this? Because I think there's something wrong with how you're going about this.

You're not going to say, that's my business, that's not your business. It is our business together because we are the church. We are the people that are being looked to as to what the church is like.

[30 : 28] And that world out there is waiting today to see you without adding the salt. Waiting for you to forget to add the salt that you need in your lifestyle, in your speech.

You remember Jesus in chapter 10 of Mark when again the disciples were disputing among themselves as to who was the most important, who was the greatest.

He said to them, even the Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

And you find that illustrated in John 13 where he put off his outer garments and took the towel of a slave and began to wash the feet of his disciples.

And he asked this question of them, do you know what I have done to you? You call me Lord and you call me Master. You say rightly, that's who I am. But do you understand what I have done to you?

[31 : 44] Do you understand what you've seen happening? The Lord of glory has actually come to be a servant, a slave indeed, washing your feet.

He has come to be that low, willingly, to serve you. That's what he said to them. And then he said, I have given you an example as I have washed your feet.

You are to wash one another's feet. That means spiritually, of course, primarily. You are to look out to be helpers to each other, to uphold each other, to pray for each other, to encourage each other. another. And then later in that same chapter, 13 of John, he expanded on that a little further. As I have loved you, so you are to love one another.

I have given you an example, and that is our example. Go back to 1 Peter 2, chapter, where he is mentioned as our example.

[32 : 52] In speech as in everything else. When he was reviled, reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not.

What did he do instead? He committed himself to him who judges righteously. Oh, if only in the church of God, more people in its history had dropped the things they were so concerned about against other people and committed themselves to the God who judges righteously.

Conduct yourselves wisely to those who are outside. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, that you may know always how to speak appropriately to each person.

Let's pray. gracious Lord, we thank you for the guidance your word brings to us, even in terms of our speech.

You are most interested and concerned in every aspect of our lives that we should live to your glory. Forgive us, Lord, the number of times we fail to match up to that standard.

[34 : 15] Forgive us, we pray, for thoughts and words that have caused hurt to others in the course of our life. Forgive us for the mistakes we have made in regard to the conducting of ourselves to outsiders.

Forgive us, we pray, for the many moments we have taken our eye off you as our example. Grant that we may, from this day forth, be more concerned to be, indeed, people who live a savoury life to the glory of your name.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's conclude now by singing in Psalm 141, Psalm 141, again in St.

Psalms, verses 1-5. O Lord, I call to you, come quickly, I am in need. When I cry to you for help, to my appeal, give heed.

Psalm, that's on page 185, and we're singing verses 1-5, Psalm 141, the tune of the tune of Golden Hill, O Lord, I call to you.

[35 : 28] O Lord, I call to you, come quickly, I may be, but when I cry to you for help, to my appeal, give heed.

thy incense make my prayer before your face arise, the raising hope my love's divine in evening sacrifice.

Keep watch your dawn my love and guard my lips I pray.

Let not my heart to evil thoughts be drawn and let us stay.

Keep me from taking part in what the evil do.

[37 : 23] Let be not his fair choices food, lest I be false to you.

A righteous man's rebuke will be a soothing power, such close and kindness in that me will never do me harm.

God now I'm told by the church office that somebody has just taken a turn, a fainting turn. So please, those of you who are downstairs, please do not use the main door, just in consideration of that.

If you just use this door and this one here, those of you who are up in the gallery, obviously you need to use the main door. But please, those who are downstairs, please use both these doors downstairs after the benediction.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.