

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

New Habits for the New Self

Colossians 4:2–6

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to the book of Colossians. We are continuing our verse-by-verse study of this book in our series "Preeminence." We come today to a passage—Colossians 4:2–6—that emphasizes in equal measure both *prayer* and *evangelism*. Let's talk about those two important "New Habits of the New Self."

One of the most famous missionaries who ever lived was a man named Hudson Taylor. Taylor was a nineteenth-century missionary who dedicated his life to the evangelization of China. He founded what came to be known as the China Inland Mission. And Taylor was also a great man of prayer. He saw God answer an amazing number of prayers throughout his life.

And Taylor had helped recruit missionaries and set up these mission stations throughout China. And there was one mission station that was particularly blessed with converts, far above all the others. And this result didn't really make sense, because the other stations were doing the exact same things that this station was. They were equal in devotion and in ability.

And Taylor was pondering this when he traveled to England to speak. And once after a meeting, a man came up to him and began to ask him about that particular station—the one that was so fruitful. Then he began to ask many personal questions about the person leading that station. It turned out that this man had been the college roommate of the missionary at that station many years earlier, and he had committed himself to daily praying for the work there. Taylor now realized what differentiated this station from all the others.¹

Now, it's pretty easy for me to get up here and preach passionately about the truth of God's Word. That's red-meat for our Messiah Bible Church crowd. I could preach about the importance of praise and worship too, and the majority of this church would say, "Hallelujah. Amen." But the subject matter for today's message can sometimes elicit a tepid response from God's people—prayer and evangelism.²

And the irony of that is that most scholars believe that this passage of Scripture (Colossians 4:2–6), closes out the body of the book of Colossians. Everything that follows is greetings and salutations.

So Paul closes out the body of the book of Colossians talking about prayer and evangelism. Paul closes out his discussion on the new self with five verses on the habits of prayer and evangelism. This must be important to Paul. This must be important to the church in Colossae. This must be important to God. This must be important for us.

Go ahead and write this down in your notes, church. I want to give you this morning four new habits for the new self in Christ Jesus.³ Here's the first.⁴

1) Prayer **mixed** with thanksgiving (4:2)

¹ Taken and adapted from Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 138.

² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 318: "Almost all of this material has been inward-looking, focusing on relationships within the Christian community. Colossians 4:2–6, however, looks outward, with a focus on Paul's evangelistic work and the community's relationships with non-Christians."

³ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 318: "The movement of the paragraph is easy to follow: a general encouragement to pray (v. 2) → a request to pray for Paul's evangelistic ministry (vv. 3–4) → exhortations regarding the Colossians' evangelistic ministry (vv. 5–6)."

Paul says in **verse 2**,

² Continue steadfastly in prayer,⁵

This statement here is a command just like “husbands, love your wives” (3:19) was a command. This is a command like “set your minds on things that are above” (3:2) was a command.⁶ We, as Christians, are called to pray continually... steadfastly... relentlessly... constantly.⁷

And there are a lot of instructions in the Bible on how to pray. The Bible teaches us how to pray privately and how to pray corporately. The Bible teaches us why we pray. Jesus gives us help and instructions. The OT gives us actual prayers prayed as examples. Paul has several commands in the NT on how to pray. But Paul doesn't give that here. He really only gives us two qualifiers for our prayer times, apart from the expectation to do it continually.⁸

Look at the end of **verse 2**.

² Continue steadfastly⁹ in prayer, [1] being watchful¹⁰ in it [2] with thanksgiving.¹¹

So be watchful in prayer. And be thankful in prayer. Let's look at both of those.

What does “being watchful” mean? I think it means don't get distracted. I think it means don't lose heart. I think it means press on through the challenges of prayer. I think it means don't let your ADD kick in and all of a sudden you start thinking about the tasks for the day or the football game or the television program you watched the night before.

Jesus rebuked his disciples after he told them to be watchful and they failed. What did they do? They fell asleep. Paul said in **1 Thessalonians 5:6**, “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.” Peter said, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (**1 Peter 5:8**). So while praying, you're attentive to the Lord. You're fighting distractions. You're fighting the temptation of the enemy. You're alert. You're fighting sin. You're fighting sleep.¹² You're pouring out your heart before the Lord, and Satan is going to do everything in his power to stop

⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 290: “The reference to prayer after the discussion of the household code may be a bit surprising to modern readers, but this theme of worship continues the focus of 3:15–17. In light of the preceding (re)definition of worship in terms of leading a God/Christ-centered life ‘in word’ and ‘in deed’ (3:17), the call to act in a prayerful way in this section becomes understandable since Paul is not focusing narrowly on one's prayer but is defining one's entire existence as having prayerful alertness.”

⁵ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 182: “There is a tension between boldness and waiting on God's will. That tension is resolved by being persistent, yet accepting God's answer when it finally comes.”

⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 182: “Christians sometimes pray vague, general prayers that are difficult for God to answer because they do not really ask anything specific. To be devoted to prayer requires something specific to pray for.”

⁷ JOHN DAVENANT: “This perseverance of prayer, then, does not require an uninterrupted but a frequently repeated act of prayer.” Quoted in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*, RCS, 238.

⁸ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 136–7: “Paul's parallel challenge in Ephesians 6:18 presents the attitude in no uncertain terms: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 319: “Paul highlights the need not only to pray, but to make prayer a standard feature of the Christian life: *Devote yourselves to prayer*. The point, then, is not that believers should pray with intensity when they pray but that they should pray habitually and with perseverance”

¹⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 320: “The word translated *being watchful* (the participle *grēgorountes*) has the basic sense of being ‘awake’ and alert. In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, for example, the same verb, translated in TNIV ‘we are awake,’ is contrasted with being ‘asleep.’ This 1 Thessalonians text also illustrates another facet of this verb in the New Testament: it often calls for Christians to be alert or watchful in light of the imminent return of Christ (twelve of the twenty-two New Testament occurrences are in such a context: Matt. 24:42, 43; 25:13; Mark 13:34, 35, 37; Luke 12:37; 1 Thess. 5:6, 10; Rev. 3:2, 3; 16:15).”

¹¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 179: “Prayer... is the most important speech the new man can utter.”

¹² AUGUSTINE: “Impure love, brothers and sisters, compels those who are possessed by it to keep awake; the shameless person watches, in order to seduce; the evildoer, in order to harm; the drunkard, to drink; the bandit, to slay; the self-indulgent, to spend; the miser, to hoard; the thief, to steal; the robber, to smash and grab. How much more, therefore, ought love to remain awake in holy and harmless people, if iniquity can extort wakefulness from the criminal and the corrupt?” Quoted in Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 55.

you. The church father, **John Chrysostom** said once, “**The devil knows, yes he knows, how great a good prayer is.**”¹³

I know how that feels to many of you even as I say it. It feels burdensome. It feels guilt-inducing. I know that’s how I felt when I read this and studied this this last week. I told the Lord, “**Lord, I have failed at this again and again and again. I’m horrible at maintaining vigilance when I pray.**”

If that’s how you feel right now, let me help you with that. **1)** We are not saved by our vigilance and prayer. So don’t feel the guilt of condemnation. Feel the goodness of conviction. **2)** Paul gave this as a command at the end of this book because he knows it’s hard. He knows how distractions can disrupt your prayers. He knows how busyness can lead to prayerlessness. So he says aggressively and commandingly...

² *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful*

Don’t feel the guilt of condemnation. There is not condemnation in Christ. Feel the goodness of conviction. And let it motivate you to pray.

And then Paul says wonderfully at the end of this verse...

² ... *with thanksgiving.*

That ties into a theme that runs through **Colossians**. Paul emphasizes thanksgiving at least seven times in this book (**Col 1:3–5, 12–14; 2:6–7; 3:15–17; 4:2**). This is the last of those seven. Essentially we should do everything as a Christian with an attitude of *gratitude*. We should worship with *gratitude* (**Col 3:16**). We should remember our salvation with *gratitude* (**Col 1:12–14**). We should grow as a Christian with *gratitude* (**Col 2:6–7**). We should let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts with *gratitude* (**Col 3:15**). Paul says in **Colossians 3:17** that whatever we do in word or deed should be done in gratitude. And just to put a cherry on the top of this thanksgiving theme in **Colossians**, Paul says in **Colossians 4:2**, make sure your constant prayers are constantly laced with thanksgiving.¹⁴

One of my favorite verses in the Bible, one of the passages of Scripture that I have recited from memory more than any other is probably **Philippians 4:6**. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication... *with thanksgiving*...”

For whatever reason—I don’t know why—but whenever I recite that passage I sometimes forget to state that prepositional phrase. But we’ve got to emphasize that... “with thanksgiving.” “Do 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” (**Phil 4:6–7**).

What are the new habits of the new self? First of all there is prayer mixed with thanksgiving. Let’s stay on the subject of prayer a little longer, because Paul does. Here’s a second habit.

2) Prayer **focused** on evangelism (4:3–4)

Paul writes in **verse 3**...

³ *At the same time,*

In other words, while you are praying persistently and vigilantly and filled with thanksgiving...
*pray also for us,*¹⁵

Paul said earlier in the book of **Colossians**, “**We are praying for you**” (**Col 1:9–14**). Now he says, “You pray for us.” It’s sanctified *quid pro quo*. You pray for us. We’ll pray for you!

¹³ Quoted in Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 54.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 137: “Joshua returned to Gilgal to gaze on the stones of remembrance (the stones taken from the Jordan when God held back the waters so Israel could cross). Thus he was refreshed, and his heart rejoiced in thanksgiving (Joshua 4).”

¹⁵ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 290: “Here in Colossians, the note on prayer may also remind the audience of Paul’s earlier note on his diligence in praying for them: ‘we ... have not ceased praying for you and asking God that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom’ (1:9). As Paul prays persistently for the Colossian believers for their faithfulness in Christ, Paul now calls on them to participate in this same act for the continued spread of the gospel.”

And the “us” in **verse 3** probably refers to both Paul and Timothy, but it may also refer to the others listed in the next passage: Tychicus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Onesimus, Epaphras, Luke.¹⁶ More on them next week.

³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word,¹⁷ to declare the mystery¹⁸ of Christ, on account of which I am in prison¹⁹ — ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

That’s an amazing prayer request right there from the Apostle Paul. What a privilege this church had to pray for the ministry and the work of the Apostle Paul. And what an example Paul sets for the church here.

Pray for evangelism. Pray for my witness. Pray for the gospel to spread.²⁰

Now let me say a few things about this prayer request. First of all notice that Paul prays for an open door. Everyone see that in **verse 3**? What does that mean—an open door?²¹ It means openness for the gospel.²² It means favor from God to spread the gospel. And notice too that God has to open that door. And notice too that we can pray for God to open a door.²³

A door for what? A door for the word. A door for the logos. A door for the gospel, which Paul describes here as “the mystery of Christ.” What is the “mystery of Christ”?²⁴ Let’s be clear about that. Paul asks for prayer that he can make the gospel clear. **I pray right now, “Lord, help me to make the gospel crystal clear right now for someone who needs to hear it.” Amen!**

The gospel is this. The mystery of Christ is this. Jesus Christ, the God of the universe, the second person of the Trinity was born into this world as a baby. God the Father saw the state of humanity. He saw our sinfulness and our fallenness and our lostness. He knew there was no hope for us apart from his intervention. So he sent his Son to earth to be born as the Christ, the incarnate God, the Messiah. And that child born in Bethlehem grew up and became the most amazing teacher/healer/prophet who ever lived. And as part of God’s plan, the people of this world rejected him. They arrested him. They brutalized him. They crucified him. And

¹⁶ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 292: “The pronoun ‘us’ that appears twice in this clause (ἡμῶν, ἡμῖν) points likely to Paul and his coworkers, including Timothy (1:1) and Epaphras (1:7; 4:12), although he later focuses on his own mission with the use of the singular pronoun (‘me,’ v. 4) and first person singular verbs (‘I am bound,’ v. 3; ‘I may proclaim,’ v. 4).”

¹⁷ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 292: “The opening of a door ‘for the word’ (τοῦ λόγου) reminds the audience of the powerful ‘word of truth, the gospel’ in 1:5, the ‘word’ that can ‘come’ to the audience while ‘bearing fruit and growing’ (1:6).”

¹⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 325–6: “Paul has used this verb [*phaneroō*] earlier in Colossians to refer to Christ’s final ‘appearance’ in glory (3:4) and, of greater relevance to this verse, in 1:26 with reference to ‘the mystery,’ which, he says, ‘has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed (*ephanerōthē*) to the Lord’s people.’ Indeed, as we noted in our comments on 1:26, Paul regularly uses this verb to refer to the revelation, or manifestation, of eschatological events, whether ones connected with Christ’s first coming (e.g., Rom. 3:21; 16:26; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:10) or his second (1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul can also use the verb, as he does here, for his own proclamation of God’s revelation (2 Cor. 2:4; 3:3; 11:16). In doing so, he implies that his own preaching stands in continuity with God’s own revelation: what God has revealed in history, Paul now reveals in his own preaching. This verse therefore points to the significant salvation-historical role that Paul claims for himself more explicitly elsewhere (e.g., Rom. 11:13–15; Eph. 3:1–10; Col. 1:24–28).”

¹⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 293: “Paul’s imprisonment becomes a concrete example of Paul’s suffering noted in 1:24.”

²⁰ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 290: “To Paul, prayer is not simply an act of presenting one’s personal wishes and desires to God; rather, it is a way for believers to participate in the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan in history.”

²¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 183: “A door in the New Testament usually refers to an opportunity. In 1 Corinthians 16:8–9, Paul writes, ‘I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.’ He later wrote to the Corinthians of the door that had opened for him at Troas (2 Cor. 2:12).”

²² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 322: “An ‘open door’ is a natural metaphor for the idea of ready access to an opportunity and is therefore widely used in the ancient world. It occurs in the New Testament to refer to an opportunity for evangelistic ministry (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; cf. Rev. 3:8, 20).”

²³ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 300: “Believers are to pray that ‘God may open ... a door for the word’ (v. 3). Fully realizing that it is God who will create for his followers the opportunity to preach the word, Paul reminds the audience that evangelistic efforts depend on God.”

²⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 183: “The term *mystery* refers to something hidden in the Old Testament but manifest in the New. In the present context, it refers to the content of the gospel. Paul asks the Colossians to pray that he would have an open door to speak the full truth of the gospel.”

three days after his crucifixion, he rose from the dead. And instead of destroying all of humanity for their insolence and violence toward him, he instead offers us eternal life. And those who repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ shall be saved. If that's you this morning, put your faith in Christ and be saved."

That's the word, the message, of the gospel. That is the mystery of Christ that Paul declared. And what's fascinating about this verse is that Paul says in **verse 3**, "on account of that gospel, I am in prison!"

on account of which I am in prison—

That's true. Everywhere that Paul went throughout the Roman Empire he preached the gospel. And Jews and Gentiles both opposed him. And because of his faithful preaching, he was imprisoned in Philippi (**Acts 16:19–40**), imprisoned in Jerusalem (**Acts 21:27–23:30**), imprisoned in Caesarea (**Acts 23:31–26:32**), imprisoned in Rome twice (**Acts 28:16–31; 2 Tim. 1:16–17; 2:9; 4:6–8, 16–18**).

And Paul was in prison in Rome was when he wrote **Colossians**. He was under house arrest in Rome as the end of the book of **Acts** makes clear (**Acts 28:16–31**). He had some measure of freedom at this time. It wasn't like his later imprisonment when he wrote the book of **2 Timothy**. But he was still chained to a Roman guard.

And why was Paul imprisoned and chained to a guard? Did he break the law? Did he start an insurrection? Did he kill a Roman citizen? No. He preached the gospel. And yet even in prison, God was using him to preach the gospel and write Scripture and do all kinds of amazing things. And Paul says, **"Pray for me, Colossians, that I can continue preaching the gospel even while in prison."**

It's amazing, by the way, how some of the greatest things ever written in human history were written from prison. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* from prison. Martin Luther King wrote *Letter from Birmingham Jail* from ... wait for it ... the Birmingham jail. Richard Wurmbrand wrote from prison. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote from prison. And Paul wrote five of his thirteen NT letters from prison. He wrote **Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon** during his first prison stint in Rome. And then he wrote **2 Timothy** during his second prison stint in Rome. God can do amazing things in the midst of suffering.

And Paul is asking the **Colossians** here, **"Pray for me while I'm in prison to keep getting awesome gospel opportunities... and also..."** Look at **verse 4**.

⁴ *that I may make it [the gospel] clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

Paul probably had a tendency to lose his listeners with his impressive and extensive learning. Paul may have struggled at times to share the gospel clearly with his Gentile listeners, because he would lose them with his extensive explanations of the OT Scriptures that they didn't know or understand. That last statement is a bit speculative. But I think the prayer request here and Paul's heart in this matter should impact our thinking—keep the gospel clear. Keep the message clear. Don't overcomplicate it. Don't lose your audience with too many complicated or intricate details. Have a method. Have a plan for evangelism. And practice like crazy.

When I see someone struggle in evangelism and overcomplicate things, I don't think that person is so smart they can't keep it simple. I think that person needs practice. Brevity is the soul of wit. Clarity is the soul of conversion. Keep it clear and simple. Not simplistic... but simple.

Spurgeon once rebuked his pastor friends for overcomplicating their sermons. He said this: **"Christ said, 'Feed my sheep ... Feed My lambs.' Some preachers, however, put the food so high that neither sheep nor lambs can reach it. They seem to have read the text, 'Feed my giraffes.'"**²⁵

Of course the context of that statement is preaching to the converted at church. The context of Paul's statement here is the unconverted. Either way, the goal is clarity and intelligibility. You want your listeners to understand.

Pray for that with your listeners. Pray for that for your pastor and others who make a concerted effort to preach the gospel.

Write this down as #3 in your notes. Here's a third new habit of the new man.

²⁵ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 137–8.

3) Conduct **marked** by wisdom (4:5)

Paul says in **verse 5**:

⁵ *Walk in wisdom²⁶ toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*

Walk here is a command. We are commanded by Scripture to walk in wisdom. How do we get wisdom? We fear God. We read God's Word. And we pray for God for it.

But notice the context of our wisdom. And notice the context of our walking. Paul says,

⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders,*

Who are the outsiders? What's the in-group and what's the out-group here? Well, the Greek word here is ἔξω (*exō*) which is typically a preposition meaning "outside." **An exoskeleton is a skeleton that is on the outside of an animal.** But here ἔξω is nominalized meaning "the ones outside" or "the outside ones."²⁷ They are people on the outside of the in-group. And Paul is using this term to essentially describe the opposite of ἀλλήλων (*allēlōn*) meaning "one another."

So in the church, you have the ἀλλήλων—the "one another" believers. And then you have the ἔξω—unbelievers. You have those inside who are the church, and you have friends, neighbors, classmates, coworkers, etc. outside the church, who are unconverted.²⁸ But you want to see them get converted. These are the people you want to reach with the gospel and draw to Christ. Paul says elsewhere "do not be conformed to the world" (**Rom 12:2**). But he doesn't want believers to remove themselves completely from the world. That would go against the clear teaching of the Great Commission. **We are to go into all the world and make disciples (Matt 28:18–20).**²⁹

In many ways, **verse 5** flows naturally out of the evangelism emphasis of **verses 3–4**. Paul's basically saying, **"And speaking of evangelism and the gospel... make sure you walk in wisdom toward unbelievers, because you want to make a good impression on them... you want to lead them to Christ... you want to evangelize them, just like I'm doing in prison in Rome."**

What does "walking in wisdom" toward outsiders mean? It means fearing God. It means living a holy life. It means rejecting worldliness and carnality. It means working hard and living out a faithful witness before others.

It means **Matthew 5:16**, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

It means **Romans 12:1–2**: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

It means **Philippians 2:14–16**: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life."

It means **1 Peter 2:12**: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

²⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 327: "'Wisdom,' of course, is a very broad concept, occupying in biblical thought a crucial intermediate stage between thought and action. As believers immerse themselves in the life of Christ, having put on the 'new man' (3:10–11), their minds are renewed by God's Spirit (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). Wisdom will enable us to determine just how, in given situations, our new way of thinking, our new set of biblical values, should be put into effect."

²⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 326: "This is how Paul uses the Greek phrase translated 'outsiders' elsewhere (*hoi exō*, 'those outside'; see 1 Cor. 5:12, 13; 1 Thess. 4:12; and cf. Mark 4:11)."

²⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 327: "While resisting the wrong kind of outside influence, the Colossian Christians nevertheless need to stay engaged with their fellow citizens and seek to win them to Christ."

²⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 319: "Verses 5–6 also raise another issue: why does Paul spend more time here in Colossians on this matter than he does in Ephesians? We can only speculate, but it might be that Paul does not want his warnings about avoiding false teachers to lead the Colossian Christians to distance themselves from non-Christians generally. They must resist the false teachers, but they must also continue to reach out to their fellow citizens."

It means **Ephesians 2:10**: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

And notice the motivation that Paul gives us at the end of **verse 5**.

⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*

In other words, time is short. Eternity is racing toward us. You’ll be dead soon. I’ll be dead soon. Christ is returning soon. The time for evangelism and good witness is now!

Paul’s like, **“I’m in prison right now. I’ve had one foot in the grave for years! I don’t know how much longer I can hold out. I’m going to make the best use of the time. You do that too!”**

I’ve said this before but it bears repeating. Here’s why we redeem the time. Everything in eternity will be better than it is now. Everything! Our lives will be better. Our bodies will be better. The environment will be better. The food will be better. The worship will be better. The company will be better. No more crying. No more grief. No more pain. No more suffering. Everything, everything, everything will be better.

Except for this. The opportunities for evangelism won’t be better. In fact, they will be nonexistent. Now is the time for evangelism. Now is the time for preaching the gospel and walking in wisdom toward outsiders. There won’t be any outsiders in heaven. There won’t be any unbelievers to evangelize in heaven. They will be in hell separated from us for eternity. Now is the time to act! Redeem the time.

And in that same vein, write this down as #4 in your notes. Here’s a fourth new habit for the new life.

4) Speech **seasoned** with salt (4:6)

Paul writes in **verse 6**:

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

Again the context of this is outsiders. Paul is saying here, **“Be gracious in speech toward unbelievers. Don’t be obnoxious. Don’t be rude. Don’t be unnecessarily inflammatory. Season your speech with salt.”**³⁰

Why? Why does Paul want us to behave like that? So that we can build bridges for the gospel.³¹

Some of you know that I’ve recently started playing pickleball. I told myself that I would never play that game. But I can’t play basketball without getting injured, so I decided to give pickleball a try. And it’s been going well. I haven’t gotten injured yet. But I have had a few run-ins.

The other day, I reserved a court. And when I showed up to play, there were some guys playing there. And I told them, “Time’s up. We’ve got a reservation.” And these guys gave me some grief. They said, “Let us just finish our game.” And I said, “Sorry, no. I’ve only got a one-hour reservation for this court. Beat it.”

And they got really hot and bothered about this. And one of the guys, I could tell, wanted to get into it with me. And carnal Tony wanted to get into it with him. And I could just see the headlines in the San Antonio Express-News, “Local pastor gets into it with a group of ruffians over pickleball.”

And so, Christian Tony got the better of carnal Tony in that moment. And I maintained my cool... I haven’t always done that by the way... And at least in that instance I was obedient to **Colossians 4:6.**

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

Should our speech only be gracious and seasoned with salt toward outsiders and unbelievers? No. Perish the thought that we would speak with grace and kindness toward unbelievers at work and then go home and

³⁰ WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: “If you have received the grace of Christ, you will note that it says, let your speech be gracious. That is, whatever you say in grace will truly be Christ’s grace—always seasoned with salt.... It is of immense importance how a Christian answers a non-Christian, more than when a pagan answers a pagan.” Quoted in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*, RCS, 243.

³¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 186: “The early church had none of the modern means of advertising the gospel, such as TV, radio, tracts, books, magazines, or bumper stickers—and fewer of the scandals and hypocrites. Yet by living out the truth of the gospel in their personal and corporate lives, they turned their world upside down. May that be said of us.”

speaking viciously toward our spouses and our kids... or toward our church family. No, let me invoke the how much more argument again. “If Paul commands us to speak graciously toward unbelievers, how much more should we speak graciously toward believers.”³²

And the objective here is clearly stated at the end of **verse 6**. The objective of sweet and salt-seasoned speech... not salty speech, that’s different... the objective is that we may “know how to answer each person.”

Answer what? What’s Paul talking about?

I think this is a reference again to evangelism. We need to be ready to answer concerning our faith. Why do you do the things you do? Why are you like that? What is a Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian? Why don’t you behave like everyone else at work? You think you’re better than us?

How are you going to answer those questions, Christian? How are you going to answer stronger objections to Christianity? Why are Christians so judgmental? Didn’t Christians invent slavery? Aren’t Christians responsible for all the atrocities of the world? Didn’t Jesus say, ‘judge not lest you be judged’? If God is good, then why is there so much evil in the world? Why are Christians so hypocritical?³³

If you haven’t heard those objections, you will. And there are good answers to all of those questions and all of those objections.³⁴ Some of the finest minds in human history have dedicated themselves to answering those questions wisely and intelligently and accurately. And we can do that too. The Apostle Peter said in **1 Peter 3:15**, “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.”

Paul’s focus here is less on having the right answers or building the right apologetics. I’m all for that, by the way... but Paul’s focus here is on tone and affect, not facts.

⁶ *Let your speech always be gracious,*³⁵ *seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

The metaphor of salt is intriguing here. Jesus talked about his followers as being the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13). Jesus said, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50).

What does that mean? Well, salt makes things better. Salt makes things taste better. To be “seasoned with salt” means to be warm and winsome and appetizing in our conversations with others. You want to elicit in your listener a thirst for listening.³⁶

One of our elders who shall remain nameless had to give up salt in his diet recently. Doctor’s orders! And the suffering he has had to endure since then has been legion.

³² MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 187: “Whether undergoing persecution, stress, difficulty, or injustice, whether with your spouse, children, believers, or unbelievers—in all circumstances believers are to make gracious speech a habit. To speak with grace means to say what is spiritual, wholesome, fitting, kind, sensitive, purposeful, complementary, gentle, truthful, loving, and thoughtful. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29, ‘Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.’”

³³ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 331: “Paul is calling on Christians to speak with their unbelieving neighbors and friends with gracious, warm, and winsome words—all with the purpose of being able to ‘answer’ unbelievers... Paul assumes that unbelievers will be raising questions about the faith of the Colossian Christians, questions that may be neutral or even, perhaps, hostile. An appropriate Christian response will, of course, communicate the content of the gospel, but it will also be done in a manner that will make the gospel attractive.”

³⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 302: “The final purpose clause, ‘so that you may know in what way it is necessary for you to answer each one’ (v. 6), can also point to the need for believers to stand firm in what they believe. This is explicitly noted in the closely related letter written to Philemon: I pray ‘that your partnership in the faith may become effective in gaining the knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ’ (Phlm 6). Being a witness to outsiders, therefore, can in turn strengthen one’s faith in Jesus Christ.”

³⁵ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 138: “‘Grace’ in their speech presupposed grace in their hearts, ‘for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks’ (Matthew 12:34).” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 330: “Paul never uses *charis* in the sense of graciousness (though Luke does; see the reference to Christ’s ‘gracious words’ [*tois logois tēs charitos*] in Luke 4:22). It is possible, then, that *logos* might refer to ordinary human speech while *charis* retains its distinctive Christian meaning. This is the interpretation apparently reflected in the TNIV: *Let your conversation be always full of grace* (and perhaps also in KJV; NASB).”

³⁶ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 298: “Quintilian notes that ‘salty’ speech can arouse a ‘thirst for listening.’”

Why? Because salt makes things tastier. Every morning I eat eggs for breakfast. And unsalted eggs are blech! Salt makes food better. It preserves things. It brings out the best in something. “Let your speech be like that,” says Paul. Let your speech toward unbelievers (and believers) be gracious and appetizing.

I’ll close with this. Years ago, there was a young boy from northern Ireland who grew up in the Anglican church. But after the death of his mother, he rejected Christianity altogether. He became a convinced atheist. And this man was brilliant. He was a professor at Oxford. He was a specialist in medieval literature.

But while at Oxford, he crossed paths with two brilliant Christians who influenced him greatly. One of those people was the famous J.R. Tolkien whose deep faith was matched by his humility and intellectual honesty. The other person was a man named Hugo Dyson who became a great friend to this man—Clive Staples Lewis... better known to us as C.S. Lewis.

And Lewis started to move from atheism to agnosticism to theism to eventual Christianity. He referred to himself in his writings as England’s most reluctant convert. And Lewis later admitted that these friendships with Christians made it increasingly difficult to dismiss Christianity as irrational or merely emotional. The conduct of these believers gave credibility to the message they proclaimed.

Now, I believe that God is sovereign in these matters. He opens doors. He changes hearts. For every C.S. Lewis out there, there may be some other person whose heart gets harder and meaner when Christians represent Christ well. Like I’ve said before, “To some we are the aroma of Christ and we smell good. To others, we stink like death.”

It’s not our job to do the saving. We leave that to the Lord.

But we are his witnesses. We speak. We pray. We walk in wisdom. We represent Christ as best we can as long as we can until Christ calls us home... and we leave the results to God.

And praise God, sometimes, we get to be used by him to bring someone to Christ. I live for those moments. Let’s practice what Paul preaches here. Let’s pray and evangelize. Pray with me.