

Redeeming the Time: Open Doors of Opportunity

Colossians 4:2-6

Colossians 4:2-6 - *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; ³ meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, ⁴ that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.⁵ Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”*

Background Notes

In verse 3, Paul stated that he was in chains (v3). Paul was a prisoner when he wrote the letter to the Colossians. That's why Colossians is known as one of the four "Prison Epistles" (as we mentioned in our introductory studies). Colossians was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment, in the early 60s AD. When Paul was under house arrest (see Acts 28). (He wasn't in wasn't in a dungeon - that came later, in his second Roman imprisonment.) Paul was under arrest, in his rented house. He could have people in; he could preach; he could write letters; he could send his associates on a missionary travels - but he was chained to a Roman guard. He was a prisoner at all times.

The second background note is about the phrase in verse 6: *“seasoned with salt.”* Today we use salt to flavor our food, so we might think “seasoned with salt” means to flavor our speech, so that our talk won't be boring. No, that's not the idea. In that day there was no refrigeration, and salt was used as a preservative, to prevent food from decaying.

In the same way, our speech as Christians should help prevent the spread of moral decay in our culture. That's why the Lord Jesus said, *“You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 13:5)*. So wherever we are - on the job, in the community, in school, wherever - our lives, and especially our speech, should help limit the constant spread of moral decay all around us. Each one of us should be a grain of salt.

Doctrinal Point

We should be concerned about “outsiders.”

The term *“outsider”* (v5) refers to unbelievers. They're called outsiders because they're outside the family of God, outside the Church, and outside God's kingdom.

Let's remember the structure for the practical half of the book of Colossians (chapter 3-4). The structure of Colossians is like a diagram of concentric circles - like a target. The label for the diagram would be: “Making Christ Supreme and All Sufficient” - because that is the theme of the book of Colossians.

If we would make Christ supreme and all-sufficient in our lives, we start with the inner circle: continually practicing the biblical method of gaining victory over sin in our personal lives (3:1-3). Then we move out to the next ring: continually “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new man” (3:6-10). The third ring is continually relating properly to fellow believers (3:11-17). In our last session, we moved on to a fourth ring: continually submitting to God’s authority structures (3:18-4:1).

In Colossians 4:2-6 we’re moving out further, to a fifth concentric circle: we should be concerned about “outsiders” (v2-6). How should we be concerned about outsiders? Two ways are mentioned here: we should pray for outsiders (v2- 4) and we should witness to outsiders (v5-6).

a. Pray for “open doors.”

Verse 2 seems to be about prayer in general, but very quickly the apostle moved to the subject of prayer focused on outsiders (v3). In reference to prayer in general, we’re to be vigilant or watchful (v2). We’re to stay alert. 1

Thessalonians 5:17 says that we’re to pray without ceasing, and Colossians 4:2, says that we’re to pray without sleeping! How many of you have ever fallen asleep while you’re praying?

The idea here in being watchful or vigilant is not that we shouldn’t pray when we’re tired. The main idea is that we should watch out for **spiritual drowsiness**. For example, the more our attitudes are involved in this world, the more we’ll be spiritually dull and drowsy in our prayer lives. We need to stay alert and be watchful.

In verse 3, the focus is in prayer for “outsiders” – for unbelievers. We’re to pray for open doors - that God will open a door for the Word to be spread. Notice what Paul did *not* request: he did **not** ask them to pray about him being chained in prison, or for his release. Paul had a higher priority. He asked them to pray that God would open doors for the ministry, so that the gospel of Christ would be able to reach to outsiders.

We need to take a lesson here. So often when we pray, we tend to pray about our problems, our plans, our friends, and ourselves, but we need to be concerned about outsiders. We need to reach out in our prayers. and pray for open doors. I’m sure that many of you are praying each day for the outsiders who are being touched by your witness, or your church, or your ministry. God loves to answer that kind of prayer!

When a Jewish family moved in next to us, we prayed for an open door to speak to them about Christ. You can’t believe how quickly the Lord answered that prayer! We made friends with them, and within a week we were discussing eternal realities with them!

b. Walk in wisdom.

Verses 5 and 6 discuss a second way in which we should be concerned about outsiders: our witness. We're to "*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.*" If we "walk with wisdom," our way of life will not "raise the eyebrows" of outsiders. Remember – unbelievers are watching how we live our lives!

Have you ever noticed that the world has a different set of standards by which they judge Christians? For example, if you take a longer coffee break than you should, unbelievers will evaluate your actions by a higher set of standards, and talk about you doing it - even though they do the same thing! And if you walk with wisdom, you won't put a bumper sticker on your car that says "Jesus is the Way" - and then drive over the speed limit.

c. Redeem the time.

Besides walking in wisdom, and we are also to redeem the time. We are to make the most of every opportunity. Strike while the iron is hot! Don't lose the windows of time with outsiders that the Lord gives you. The Lord may give you a window of time with your neighbor, or with a work colleague, or maybe with the person sitting next to you on a plane. Strike while the iron is hot! Redeem the time!

When there is a death in an unbeliever's family - maybe a neighbor - that's an ideal window of time. During times of grief people are often more open to hearing about the love of Jesus Christ, and that God is the only One who can truly bring comfort into their situation. Take advantage of these occasions. Redeem the time!

Practical Application

Let's put some moral bite into our talk with outsiders.

In reference to our witness, our words are always to be "*with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*" Remember what the phrase "*seasoned with salt*" meant in the 1st century context. As salt prevented the spread of decay in food, so our talk should prevent the spread of moral decay in our culture.

We need to speak out against the glaring sins of our society. Right now it's not politically correct to speak out against divorce or abortion or homosexuality, but if our speech is going to be "seasoned with salt" we must do so. In the scientific community, it's not politically correct to depart from the "big bang" scenario, but we need to speak out for the God of Creation if our speech is to be seasoned with salt.

Notice that our talk is to be **seasoned** with salt - not **inundated** with salt! Don't shout across the street to your neighbor that he's a sinner and on the way to hell. No! Our words are to be tactful ("*with grace*") - but still to be seasoned with salt. The normal pattern of our talk should be gracious - free from gossip, free from bitterness, free from dirt, free from

badmouthing, free from sour grapes! Normally our talk will be tactful and gracious, but don't forget – it is to be seasoned with salt. It is to have some moral “bite”!

How much “seasoning” we use will depend on the particular outsider we're dealing with. Our aim is to answer each person appropriately (v6), using different approaches. That's part of the wisdom that's required for walking with wisdom toward outsiders. Let's be gracious in our talk with outsiders, but remember - sometimes we need to put a little more “moral bite” into our conversations with our non-Christian friends.