

“Some Final Instructions”

August 27, 2017

Colossians 4:2-6

I. Introduction

Paul is bringing his letter to the Colossians to a close. Since the beginning of chapter 3 he has been writing about the new man in Christ. In [verses 5-17](#) he discussed the personal characteristics of the new man—in particular, in [verses 12-14](#) he listed the virtues that should be seen in every Christian’s life; in [verse 17](#) he gave the motive or goal of the Christian life: “**Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**” Then beginning with [verse 18 of chapter 3](#), as we saw last week, Paul wrote about the home life of the new man in Christ. In today’s Scripture, in his final instructions, Paul focused on something that affects the life of every Christian and his witness to others. Paul saved the best for last; his final instructions were about the speech of every Christian. Speech is something that the watching world looks at carefully when it evaluates Christianity. Next to the thoughts, attitudes, and motives, it is also the most difficult area for believers to control.

The power of speech is a gift from God, and it must be used the way God wants. James wrote about this power, [turn to James 3:2-12](#). James compares the tongue to a bridle and a rudder, a fire and a poisonous animal, a fruit tree and a spring. These three pairs of pictures teach us that the tongue has the power to control, the power to destroy, and the power to satisfy. The tongue may be a small part of our body, but it can accomplish great things for good or for evil. In this section regarding the speech of the new man, Paul listed 4 important areas of speech beginning with prayer.

II. Four Areas of Speech

A. Prayer Prayer is the most important speech a Christian can speak. Prayer is the link between the believer and his Lord. The more we talk or converse with a person, the more we come to understand them. The same is true of our relationship with God. The more we talk, i.e. pray, to Him and listen to His answers, the more we come to understand Him. Prayer is also the source of the Christian’s power—in [John 14:13](#)

Jesus said, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” James 4:2 says, “You do not have, because you do not ask God.” But James goes on to write in James 4:3, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” It’s through prayer that believers confess their sins, offer praise to God, intercede for others, and call on their sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:15-16). Paul described 3 characteristics of prayer.

1. Be persistent, i.e. Don’t quit “Devote yourselves to prayer” means “to hold fast and not let go,” i.e. don’t quit. Paul was saying that believers were to be persistent in prayer. This is the way the early church prayed—Acts 1:14 says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” In Acts 10:2 we read that Cornelius, a centurion, “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” Too many so-called Christians pray only occasionally—when they feel like it or when there is some type of crisis and prayer is their last resort. *Question:* If you need help, do you go first to one of your friends or to a distant acquaintance? So using prayer as the last resort means???

In Ephesians 6:18 Christians are told to “Always keep on praying;” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray continually.” This doesn’t mean that we are to walk around muttering prayers under our breath. Rather, it means that we should be in constant fellowship with God so that prayer is as normal to us as breathing. This also doesn’t imply that we will get our requests only after we have “worn God down.” Like any loving parent, God enjoys answering our requests, our prayers. But sometimes He delays the answer to increase our faith and devotion or to accomplish His purpose at just the right time. God’s delays are not always God’s denials. As we continue in prayer, as we grow in our understanding of who God is, our own hearts are prepared for the answer God will give.

2. Be watchful Secondly Paul wrote: “Being watchful.” The phrase “Watch and pray” is used often in the Bible. As well as always being in “prayer mode,” we need to set aside time when we can devote

ourselves to prayer; time when we are awake and able to focus on God. We need to get away from the TV, the computer and even our cell phones—anything that would cause us to interrupt our conversation with our heavenly Father. But Paul was saying more than that. We need to get away from routine prayers—prayers that are done by rote: “*Now I lay me down to sleep...*” Christians also need to get away from vague prayers—general prayers; “*Bless all the missionaries*” To be watchful means to pray for something specific, something for God to answer; to be watchful means we need to be alert for specific needs and then watch for God’s specific answers.

3. Be Thankful “*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*” The third characteristic is “*Be thankful.*” Thanksgiving is an important part of successful prayer—turn to [Philippians 4:6-7](#). If all we do is ask, and never thank God for His gifts, we are selfish. There is so much to be thankful for: for our salvation, for God’s protection, for His promises, for His answers to our prayers. The answer may not be the answer that was expected, but God will answer and as [Romans 8:28](#) says, “*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*”

B. Proclaiming the Word The 1st areas of speech is prayer, a second area of speech is *proclaiming the Word*. Having exhorted the Colossians to pray, Paul gave them a specific request, “*Pray for us, too.*” His request was “*that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ.*” Notice that Paul didn’t ask for the prison doors to be opened or that the chains be removed; he asked that doors of ministry might be opened. His concern wasn’t for personal safety or material help, but for spiritual opportunities; opportunities to proclaim, to speak the Word of God.

Believers are to pray for open doors for themselves and for others; it is God who opens doors and it is God who keeps them open—in the letter to the Church in Philadelphia in [Revelation 3:7-8](#) we read, “*To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no-one can shut, and what he shuts no-one can open. I know your deeds. See, I*

have placed before you an open door that no-one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

Paul was in jail because of his preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but he didn't ask that his chains be removed, but that he “**may proclaim it, i.e. the Gospel, clearly, as he should.**” Paul wanted people to pray that he would speak as he ought to speak, as God wanted him to speak. Proclaiming the Word of God is a great privilege and a tremendous responsibility. One doesn't have to be an ordained preacher or a missionary to share God's Word. Even in your daily conversation you can plant the seed of the Word into people's hearts and then pray that God will water that seed and make it grow (1 Cor. 3:7). Romans 10:14 says, “**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**” An important area of speech is proclaiming God's Word.

C. Actions The 3rd area of speech is: actions. Paul wrote, “**Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.**” Paraphrasing a quote from a couple of weeks ago, “*What you are doing speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you are saying.*” Actions speak for us. What believers do, gives credibility to what they say. Believers are to exhibit a carefully planned, consistent, righteous Christian life. The unsaved outsiders watch Christians and are very critical of everything they do. There must be nothing in our lives that would jeopardize our testimony.

Being wise means that we are careful not to do anything that would make it difficult to share the Gospel. Acting wisely includes doing our work, paying our bills, and keeping our promises. As 1 Timothy 3:7 says, Christians in general and Christian leaders in particular “**must also have a good reputation with outsiders, i.e. the unsaved.**” When I first started teaching—many, many years ago, there was a teacher who claimed to be a Christian—he had all the right words, he attended church regularly—even midweek prayer meetings, and he claimed to read the Bible daily. But his actions sullied the name *Christian*. He happened to be a track coach and every year when the team came to a particularly difficult track meet he

would tell his squad that he had been diagnosed with a terminal disease and didn't have long to live. He would imply that this was probably his last season. He would beg them to win this one meet so that he could die satisfied. But, you know, he always seemed to be around the next year. He also had a habit of ordering track equipment that somehow seemed to disappear by the end of the year. A surprise raid on his store room, one day, netted enough equipment to field another complete track team. Needless to say, the name *Christian* had a very negative reputation among those that knew him. It took years to change the attitude of those in school towards those who were in truth Christians. His actions spoke so loudly that no one could hear what anyone was saying about being a Christian!

D. Witnessing Living a godly life also involves making “the most of every opportunity.” Every Christian has been given *the Great Commission* from **Matthew 28:19-20**: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Christians need to back up their actions with words—turn to **1 Peter 3:15-16**. Opportunities can pop up suddenly and sometimes disappear just as fast. We need to be ready to respond in action and also in words. This brings us to the 4th area of speech: *witnessing*.

Paul wrote back in **verse 6**, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” It isn't enough to walk wisely and carefully before unbelievers, there are times when something must be said. The Christian's speech must always be with grace. There is no place for those things that characterize the unredeemed mouth. Whether undergoing persecution, stress, difficulty, or injustice, whether in relationships with a 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, complementary, gentle, truthful, loving and thoughtful; Paul put it this way in **Ephesians 4:29**, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

In Paul's day, salt was used as a preservative. The believer's speech should act as a purifying influence, rescuing conversation from the filth, innuendoes, and rudeness that often appear. As today, salt was also added for flavor. The Christian's speech should add charm and wit to a conversation and not drag it down into the depths of sin.

Paul added that believers must also "know how to answer everyone." They must know how to say the right thing at the right time. As we read earlier from 1 Peter 3, believers must "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." We live in a hostile world, we need to have the answers ready for those who challenge us or are curious about our faith—the only way you can be ready is to study God's Word—1 Timothy 2:15 (NAS) says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

III. Conclusion

Prayer, proclaiming the Word, actions, witnessing; Paul left these most important topics for the last—he didn't want anyone to miss them. These four areas of speech of the new man—of the Christian—are extremely important. So how is your prayer life? Do you have a time set aside to meet with God daily? When difficulty comes your way, is your first response to offer up a prayer to God? Romans 12:12 says, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Are you faithful in prayer? When you pray, do you pray for those who share the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you pray for open doors for them? How about yourself, do you look for opportunities to share the Gospel with those around you? Can you explain how one can be saved? (Roman Road: Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9-10; 10:13) What do your actions say about you? Do they demonstrate that you are a Christian or do you blend in with everyone around you? What about your conversation, the things you talk about, the things you laugh at, your response to trouble—are they full of grace? If you were to tell those around you, those you see every day, that you are a Christian, would they be surprised, even shocked? Do you even have to tell them?

This morning as we close in prayer, I'm not going to start praying right away, instead take the quiet time to look at your life with the eyes of those around you. Look at your life as God would look at you. Is your speech—your prayer life, your actions, your witnessing—something God is proud of? I would challenge you to make the needed changes so that when you stand before God you will hear, **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”** (Matthew 25:21)