

How To Be An Effective Witness

Colossians 4:2-6

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Beginning in chapter 4, verse 2 of Colossians, you are no longer in the doctrinal section of Colossians. Then Paul closes with practical exhortations at the end of the book.

Paul says in Colossians 4:2-6, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 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, that I may make it..."—that is, "the Gospel of Christ"—"...manifest as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside..."—or "unbelievers"—"...redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

Someone said,

"You're writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,

By the things that you do and the words that you say.

Men read what you write, whether faithful or true.

Tell me, what is the Gospel, according to you?"

Are you living the Gospel in your family, in your home, in your workplace, in the church, in the world?

Verse 5 of our text is the key to this passage. Paul says, "Walk..."—or "live"—"...in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time." The phrase "those who are outside" is referring to unbelievers. They are without God, they are without Christ, they are without hope and they are without eternal life. They are outside the church. So we, as Christians, live and walk before a watching world. Paul tells us how to walk today in wisdom toward the unbelievers around us. We, as Christians, have a responsibility to be effective in our witness to the watching world.

So the questions are, "How do we walk in wisdom toward the unbelieving world? How can we be effective as a witness to those who are watching?" There are three things we can do. First, we need to pray purposefully, verses 2-4; second, we need to walk wisely, verse 5; and third, we need to speak graciously, verse 6. So the three things we need to be effective in our witness are to be praying purposefully, walking wisely and speaking graciously.

Verses 2-4 say, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 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, that I may make it manifest..."—or "clear"—"...as I ought

to speak.”

So the first thing we need to do to be an effective witness is we need to pray purposefully. Someone said, “We can’t be effective in our witness if we don’t learn to pray. Before we speak to men for God, we must speak to God for men.” We must learn to intercede and pray.

Now how should we pray? First, we need to pray faithfully. The phrase, “Continue earnestly in prayer,” is an imperative in the present tense. It’s a present, active imperative. It means we should pray continually, habitually and ongoing. In other words, devote yourselves to prayer. Some have literally translated this as “Devote your time, attention, strength to the task of prayer.”

In Luke 18, Jesus told a parable about persistent prayer. The reason He told this parable was because He said, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart,” verse 1. He wants us to be persistent in prayer. Sometimes we faint or “lose heart” because we don’t pray. If we prayed, we wouldn’t faint.

The paraphrase of this parable is that there was a judge who didn’t fear God or man. Then there was a widow who came before the judge and said, “Get justice for me from my adversary.” He wouldn’t for a while, but then he thought that even though he didn’t fear God or man, he would avenge her so she would stop bothering him. Literally in the Greek it says, “lest she give me a black eye.” So finally he gave her what she wanted. “Then Jesus said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said.’”

Now this parable is a parable in contrast. God is not an unjust judge. We don’t have to bug Him or pester Him for Him to say, “Okay, okay! You can have the new car!” Rather, God is a loving, caring Father who stands ready and willing to answer our prayers.

So if an unjust judge answered this widow who pestered Him, then Jesus said, “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” in Matthew 7:11. And in verses 7-8 of the parable, Jesus said, “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” He asks if there will be anyone who is faithful.

Thus, the lesson in contrast is that God is not an unjust judge. But it’s also a lesson in persistence, that we should continue in prayer and “not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” So where Paul says, “Continue earnestly in prayer,” the idea is that we should pray faithfully.

In Acts 1:14, it says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” That was the priority of the early church. In Acts 6:4, it says, “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” That was the priority of the leaders of the church. In Romans 12:12, the Scripture says, “...continuing steadfastly in prayer.” So the Bible actually commands us to pray. If we don’t pray, we’re living in disobedience to God’s Word. James 5:16 says, “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” So we must pray faithfully.

Second, to be an effective witness we should pray watchfully. Verse 2 says, "...being vigilant in it" or "watch in the same." So we continue habitually in prayer, and we are "vigilant" or "watch" in prayer. What does "watch" in prayer mean? It doesn't mean that we look at our watches when we pray. I used to think that I had to pray with my watch on.

The word "watch" means "to be awake, to be alert, have your eyes wide open." It doesn't mean literally "don't sleep," although isn't it interesting that sometimes when we pray we fall asleep? Do you ever knee down next to your bed and put your hands together and put your head on your hands to pray? You start to pray and then you fall asleep.

But we should stay awake spiritually and mentally. We should be watching and waiting for what we should pray for.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he told His disciples, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Then Jesus went deeper into the Garden and came back to the disciples after agonizing in prayer. Peter, James and John were sleeping. They had the "gift of sleep."

But here Jesus isn't talking about physical sleep; He's talking about mental alertness, about being awake, about being vigilant.

And isn't it interesting that Peter was one of the disciples sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane when he should have been awake so he wouldn't fall into temptation? He later wrote in his first epistle in chapter 5, verse 8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." You have an enemy. So keep your eyes wide open, be alert and be devoted to prayer.

Charles Erdman said, "Christians should be careful to maintain special seasons for communion with God." It's so very important. Pray watchfully and faithfully.

Third, we should pray thankfully. Verse 2 says, "...with thanksgiving." So continue in prayer, watch in prayer and be thankful in prayer. Moffett translates this, "Maintain your zest for prayer by being thankful."

I think it's an interesting thought that if your prayer life is dull or dead or dying, and you want to revive your prayer life and revive your heart, try to not petition for anything, but just praise God for who He is and what He has done. Thank God for His blessings. We used to say,

"Count your blessings;

Name them one by one.

Count your many blessings;

See what God has done."

So begin to be thankful.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” So thank the Lord and praise the Lord. Philippians 4:6 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

Thanksgiving acknowledges submission to God’s will. When you’re thankful, you’re submitted to the will of God in your life. The cultivation of a thankful heart will do much to keep one alert and alive in their prayer life.

An old Scottish prayer book reads, “We praise Thee for the grace by which Thou doth enable us to bear the ills of the present world; that our souls are more enriched by a fuller experience of Thy love, a more childlike dependence on Thy will and a deeper sympathy with the suffering and with the sad.” In other words, even the things that are hard or difficult or trials we can thank God for.

Florence White Willett said,

“I thank God for bitter things;

They’re been a ‘friend to grace.’

They’re driven me from paths of ease

To storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who failed

To fill my heart’s deep need;

They’ve driven me to the Savior’s feet,

Upon His love to feed.”

Even the bitter things have been blessings, and we can give thanks to God for them.

So we pray faithfully, watchfully, and thankfully.

Now fourth, we need to pray purposefully. So how should we pray? Paul says in verses 3-4, “... meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us...”—to Paul, Timothy and the other apostles—“...a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest...”—or “clear”—“...as I ought to speak.” So Paul wants us to pray specifically, and he gives us two petitions.

I want to encourage you to be specific when you pray. Ask God. Petition Him. Thank God.

Praise God. But ask Him something. The Bible says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

I've been in prayer meetings where people say, "Lord, bless the world." Well, bless their hearts! God's probably scratching His head and thinking, I'm not sure how I do that. I do bless the world; I give all kinds of good things to everyone. And I've heard people say, "Lord, save everyone." But the Bible says that not everyone will be saved.

So we need to be specific when we pray. I think the devil loves general, nonspecific prayers. One of the reasons is because you never know if God answers them. First, we shouldn't pray contrary to the Bible, and we should pray consistent with God's will. And we should be specific when we pray.

I think it's good to keep a prayer journal. Write down what you're praying for and when you prayed for it, so you can go back to see that God answers prayer. You'll see the specific way and time that God answered your prayer. God always answers prayer; not always the way and time we want Him to answer, but He does always answer prayer. But be specific, rather than general or vague.

So what does Paul say? He says, "...praying also for us." Number one, we should pray for spiritual leaders. You can pray for me anytime you want. I'll take it. I appreciate those of you who lift me up and the other pastors here at Revival. We need your prayers. We covet your prayers. I can't tell you how important it is for God's people to pray for God's pastors and that God would use them for His glory.

And when you do that, we are being joint participants. When you pray for your pastor and God uses your pastor, then you are joint participants in what God is doing through that ministry.

And what did Paul want them to pray for him? Two specific things. First, that God would open a door for them to speak. Verse 3 says, "...that God would open to us a door for the word."

This concept of the door opening is used throughout the Scripture for an open opportunity for service. God opens doors that no one can shut, and God shuts doors that no one can open. So notice that God opens the doors; we don't open the doors. We pray, we prepare, we walk in the Spirit, we're ready to go and we keep our eyes open. When God opens the door, we need to be ready to step through that door of opportunity. God opens those doors of ministry.

Paul was asking God to open a door so they could speak. What was he wanting to speak? Number two, he was asking to be able to speak the Gospel. Verse 3 says, "...to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains."

Paul was actually asking them to pray that he would be able to do what he did to get himself into prison to begin with. When Paul was writing these words, he was in chains, technically under house arrest in Rome. It was his first imprisonment. And during this time, he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Those are known as his "prison epistles."

So I think it was interesting that he was praying for more of what got him into prison in the first place. I would be praying, "God, get me out!" I would be praying, "Lord, send someone with a cake that has a hacksaw in it!"

When I was a boy I used to love those cowboy westerns where someone gets put in jail and their friend rides up on a horse behind the jail, they throw a rope through the bars of the jail window, the rope is wrapped around the bars, the other end is tied around the horn of the saddle, the horse backs up, pulling the bars out of the window, the prisoner jumps on the spare horse and they ride off. Yeah; that's awesome! I used to want to go to jail so someone could spring me.

So Paul wasn't praying to get out of jail; Paul was praying to be an effective witness while in jail. And the reason he was in jail was because he was preaching "the mystery of Christ," the Gospel of Christ. He said, "Pray that God would give me a door of opportunity."

I think it's fascinating that Paul wrote to the Philippians that all those in Caesar's household have heard the Gospel. He said, in Philippians 4:22, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." Even those of Caesar's palace have heard the good news of Jesus Christ. He said in Philippians 1:12, "I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." So God answered their prayers, and Paul had an opportunity to preach the Gospel in Rome as well.

In Romans 1:16, Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ..."—Why?—"...for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Notice also that he wanted them to pray that when he preached the Gospel, "that I may make it manifest..."—or "clear"—"...as I ought to speak," verse 4. Here's the great Paul the Apostle wanting to be clear in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ! It's so important that we not only know the Gospel, that we preach the Gospel but that we make the Gospel clear; that we don't confuse it, substitute it or give a false Gospel.

So how do we preach the Gospel and make it clear? I want to give you some practical tips on content that should be in your witness to the world.

Number one, you start with the problem of sin. We need salvation because man has sinned. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." To be an effective witness, you must first share the bad news before you can share the good news. Why do we need Jesus? Because we've all sinned.

So the problem is sin, and number two, the punishment is God's judgment. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." The Gospel presentation should have that man is sinful, and sin brings the judgment of God; we are under the wrath of God. Sin brings God's judgement, because God is holy.

The third element in evangelism should be the provision. We have the problem of man's sin, we have the punishment for it, but we also have the provision. The provision is that God provided a Savior. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

So you start with the bad news—we're sinners; God's holy and righteous, so He'll judge your sin; but God loves you and provided a Savior in Jesus Christ.

In preaching the provision, you should always mention the Cross and its purpose. Jesus died on the Cross as a substitute. Understand that when you share with people, tell them that Jesus took our place. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was substitutionary and vicarious. Jesus didn't just die to show us His love. He didn't just die to show us that we should sacrifice our lives in service. He actually died to pay the penalty for our sins. So we're sinners and He paid the penalty for us. Jesus took our place on the Cross.

If you want to be effective in witnessing, you must come to the Cross, where God provided a Savior, a substitute who died for our sins. So preach the Cross.

Then if you preach the death of Christ as a substitute for our sins, you must also include the Resurrection of Christ. Jesus died for your sins, Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus is alive and can forgive you. "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Fourth, is the personal application or appropriation. So we have the problem, number one; the punishment, number two; the provision, number three; and the personal application, number four. Number four is that we must repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

Whether you actually use the word "repent" or not is not important, because with genuine faith comes repentance. "Repentance" means that we change our minds about our sin, about Jesus as the Savior and we turn from our sin and trust Jesus for salvation.

When Paul was talking to the Philippian jailer, in Acts 16, the jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul didn't say he had to repent; He said he had to believe. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." Does that mean we don't repent? No; that means the man was already repentant. His heart was broken. He saw his need and was turning to Christ. So you put your faith and trust in Christ.

Emphasize that you turn away from sin, and you believe in, trust in, rely on and receive Jesus as your Savior. In John 1:12, it says, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right..."—or "authority"—"...to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."

Some people get upset with the word "receive" or the words "accept Jesus." It's just a synonym for believing, for trusting, for putting your faith in Jesus.

So you realize you're a sinner, you believe Jesus died for your sins, you repent, you turn from your sins and you receive Christ as your Savior. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have

been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” We are saved “by grace...through faith.” Salvation is not of ourselves. It is a gift from God, “not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

So these five elements are needed if we are going to make the Gospel clear.

There are times that I watch preachers on TV, and I literally don't know what they're saying. Jesus said we are to “feed My sheep.” It's interesting that He didn't say, “Feed the giraffes.” Sometimes men come out of the seminary and they're so lofty in their preaching that it goes right over their heads; they don't know what they're talking about. “Get the cookies down where the kids can eat them.”

Jesus died for you, He rose for you and He can save you. You must trust Him. Simple.

So if we are going to be effective in our witness, we must pray purposefully. The second thing we need to do is to walk wisely, verse 5. They are watching us. “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside...” —“the unbelieving world” —“...redeeming the time.” Our speech and the way we live must be consistent.

The word “walk” is a present, active imperative. It means to constantly, continually and daily “walk in wisdom.” That means to live cautiously and tactfully. It involves “the fear of the Lord,” which “is the beginning of wisdom.” It also involves obeying God and obeying His Word. So we are to live consistently and walk wisely.

We also need to live before unbelievers attractively. Verse 5 says, “those who are outside.” It is a reference to non-Christians. Without God, without Christ, without salvation, they are outside the church and not a part of the body of Christ. They are without hope. We are to be wise in the way we live in front of them. So the “walk” is a figure of speech that refers to our whole conduct.

The NASB translation translates this verse as, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.”

And we need to “redeem the time,” verse 5. So we are to walk consistently, cautiously, attractively and urgently. “Redeem the time” means to “buy up every opportunity” when God opens the door.

I found that when I pray, “God, open a door for me to share the Gospel with someone today,” He always answers the prayer. It's when I blast through my day and forget to pray that prayer that I don't witness to anybody. You can simply pray, “God, give me an opportunity today. Open the door today.” Then the doorbell rings and someone's on your front porch. “What must I do to be saved?” It's amazing how God can answer that prayer.

So when the door opens, we don't want to say, “I don't know what to do! Call Pastor Miller.” You need to be ready. Walk in the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit, have the Word of God in your

heart and be ready for God to open up an opportunity for you. Be ready to “redeem the time.”

Have you ever noticed that when things are on sale it's “Today only.” Why is that? It's because they want you to have a sense of urgency. They want you to buy it now, not wait.

Jesus said, “The night is coming when no one can work.” That's a very sobering thought. There is coming a day when you will no longer be able to share the Gospel, when you will no longer be able to pray, when you will no longer be able to witness, when you will no longer be able to share the Gospel or evangelize. You'll die and go to heaven or the Lord takes you home in the rapture. Either way, “The night is coming when no one can work.” So “buy up” the opportunity. God has given you time; use that time wisely.

Thirdly and lastly, we should not only pray purposefully and walk wisely—because they're watching the way we live—but we should speak graciously, verse 6. This is the hard one. “Let your speech always...” I was attracted to that word “always.” It means “consistently.” “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” And the Bible says that we should be ready to give “a reason for the hope that is in [us].”

So to be an effective witness, we must pray right, live right and talk right. The unbelieving world is not only watching; they're listening to your speech. First, “Let your speech always be with grace.” The word “grace” is the Greek word “charis.” It means “all that is beautiful, lovely and charming.” So every word that comes out of the mouths of the believers should be beautiful and charming.

Someone said that we take the first two years of our lives to learn how to talk. Then we spend the whole rest of our lives learning how to shut up. Psalm 141:3 says, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” I like that prayer. It is easy to speak, but our words must be gracious. That means “pleasant, attractive, charming or winsome” always.

Second, we also must have our speech “seasoned with salt.” Our words are usually seasoned with pepper, hot peppers, chili peppers or spitting fire. Salt purifies and brings season and flavor. It makes wholesomeness. No vulgarity.

Third, be ready to answer. Verse 6 says, “...that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” So we are to speak graciously to everyone who asks of us. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” So showing sensitivity to the needs of each individual is what Paul means at the end of verse 6 where he says, “...that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

I'm all for Gospel tracts; they're fine. But we need to be filled with the Spirit, be sensitive to a person's needs, have the basic, important elements of the Gospel and be Spirit led in how we approach people and talk to them.

Have you noticed that when Jesus dealt with people, He dealt with them individually and in

different ways? In John 4, when He was talking with the woman at the well, He said, "Give Me a drink." In other encounters, He would ask them a question. One of the most effective ways to start witnessing to someone is to ask them a question. "Hey, nice car. What year is that car?" I've noticed that if I just ask a question, they'll start talking, and then for me it's pretty easy; they end up asking, "Well, what do you do for a living?"

"Well, it's funny you should ask. I'm a pastor." Then they freak out. They think, Oh, no! What did I just say? What cuss word did I use?! Then I tell people about Jesus. I say, "Let me tell you about Jesus." I start preaching the sermon I was planning to preach that coming Sunday. They get a dose of it. I share the Gospel with them.

Then the woman at the well said, "Give me this water, that I may not thirst." And she said to Him, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus just started the dialogue with this woman, and she came to salvation.

How about the episode in John 3 when Jesus talked to Nicodemus? What a contrast between the sinful woman at Sychar's well and Nicodemus, the religious Jew. He told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So He started a dialogue with Nicodemus.

How about the woman taken in adultery in John 8? "He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'" Jesus dealt differently with her.

And then we have the story of the rich, young ruler. Jesus said to him, "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

You don't go up to everybody you meet and say, "Sell everything you have." And the false cults would say, "And give it to me." I remember running into a cult group when I was a baby Christian. They said, "Sell everything you have and give it to us." The only things I had was a pair of trunks and a surfboard.

So there are different ways to approach different people in being led by the Holy Spirit.

Basically 1 Peter 3:15 is saying that we should be ready, be eager. "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." So you answer them with humility and respect.

Again, if every Christian would pray for the lost, look for opportunities to witness, walk in wisdom toward unbelievers and speak with seasoned speech, we would see more people won to the Savior.