

Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 17
Colossians 4:2-6 : Topic 8.0
"Community Principles for the Church"

Study By
Lorin L Cranford
cranfordville.com

Greek NT

2 Τῇ προσευχῇ
προσκαρτερεῖτε,
γρηγοροῦντες ἐν
αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, 3
προσευχόμενοι ἅμα
καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ
θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν
τοῦ λόγου, λαλήσαι τὸ
μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ,
δι' ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, 4 ἵνα
φανερῶσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ
με λαλήσαι.

5 Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε
πρὸς τοὺς ἕξω, τὸν
καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι. 6
ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν
χάριτι, ἅλατι ἡρτυμένος,
εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ
ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

La Biblia
de las Américas

2 Perseverad en la
oración, velando en ella
con acción de gracias; 3
orando al mismo tiempo
también por nosotros,
para que Dios nos abra
una puerta para la pa-
labra, a fin de dar a cono-
cer el misterio de Cristo,
por el cual también he
sido encarcelado, 4 para
manifestarlo como debo
hacerlo. 5 Andad sabia-
mente para con los de
afuera, aprovechando
bien el tiempo. 6 Que
vuestra conversación
sea siempre con gracia,
sazonada como con sal,
para que sepáis cómo
debéis responder a cada
persona.

NRSV

2 Devote yourselves to
prayer, keeping alert in
it with thanksgiving. 3 At
the same time pray for us
as well that God will open
to us a door for the word,
that we may declare the
mystery of Christ, for
which I am in prison, 4 so
that I may reveal it clear-
ly, as I should.

5 Conduct yourselves
wisely toward outsiders,
making the most of the
time. 6 Let your speech
always be gracious, sea-
soned with salt, so that
you may know how you
ought to answer every-
one.

NLT

2 Devote yourselves to
prayer with an alert mind
and a thankful heart. 3
Don't forget to pray for
us, too, that God will give
us many opportunities to
preach about his secret
plan -- that Christ is also
for you Gentiles. That is
why I am here in chains.
4 Pray that I will proclaim
this message as clearly
as I should.

5 Live wisely among
those who are not Chris-
tians, and make the most
of every opportunity. 6
Let your conversation be
gracious and effective so
that you will have the right
answer for everyone.



The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

With this final pericope of moral admonition the formal *paraenetical* section of 3:1-4:6 comes to a close. This section contains miscellaneous encouragements to Christian living in a manner rather typical of much of the *paraenesis* found both inside and outside the pages of the New Testament. The emphasis falls upon reaching up to God in prayer and also reaching out to non-believers in a positive manner.

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

An electronic copy of this study can be accessed at <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/Resources.htm>. These are located under Bible Study series. The study is free and provided as a ministry of C&L Publishing, Inc.

Also important is the Ephesian parallel in 6:18-20 (NRSV):²

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

17 καὶ τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τοῦ σωτηρίου δέξασθε, καὶ τὴν μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ῥῆμα θεοῦ, 18 διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως, προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκαρτερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων, 19 καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα μοι δοθῆ λόγος ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 20 ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι.

The similar language coming in a text in a similar position in the Ephesian letter as 4:2-6 is in the Colossian letter makes it a significant text to compare. All the more so, since Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were bundled together to be read in the churches together.

Historical Context:

External History. The editors of the United Bible Societies *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) considered on one variation in wording to have possible impact on the translation of vv. 2-6. In verse three some manuscripts read τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, “the mystery of God,” rather than τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “the mystery of Christ.”³ Most likely the switch was influenced by the phrase τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ in 2:2.⁴ Both internal and external evidence strongly supports the text reading τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, prompting the UBS editorial committee to give it an A rating, which is the highest level of certainty possible where variations surface.



The text apparatus in the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) reflects four additional places of variation in vv. 2-6.⁵ The manuscripts that reflect these variations generally represent very late, and thus not as important a witness, copies. Even the earlier mss of A and B, which are important early witnesses, do not reflect the dominate readings of the text in comparison to a larger number of earlier witnesses. Although minor changes in translations would be necessitated by adoption of any of these witnesses, the essential meaning of the passage would remain unchanged. Most of the variations are motivated by making the text conform to more common phraseology found elsewhere in Paul’s writings, and thus are stylistic in nature. None of the variations stands on strong evidence either from an internal or external analysis. Consequently the adopted reading of the text of these verses rests



²One should note that this part of the Ephesians passage is a continuation of a single Greek sentence which begins in verse 14. Thus the correct literary setting of vv. 18-20 is 6:10-20, in which vv. 14-20 is but the final sentence. The tendency of Bible translators to set vv. 18-20 up as main clause sentences and in a separate paragraph is misleading to the reader of the translation. The focus on prayer in vv. 18-20 is a part of the Christian’s ‘armor’ that God provides for faithful service to Him. Paul ran out of a piece of the Roman soldier’s armor to compare prayer to, and probably intended prayer to be the ‘energizing’ dynamic that enabled the other pieces of spiritual armor to function correctly.

³{A} Χριστοῦ P⁴⁶ x A B1 C D F G Ψ 048 075 0150 6 33 81 104 256 263 365 424 436 459 1175 1241 1573 1739 1852 1881 1912 1962 2127 2200 Byz [K] Lect it^{ar, b, d, f, g, mon, o} vg syr^{p, h} cop^{samss, bo} arm geo slav Clement Chrysostom Theodoret; Ambrose Pelagius Augustine^{2/3} // θεοῦ B* L 1319 vg^{ms} cop^{samss} eth Cyril; Ambrosiaster (Augustine^{1/3})

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

⁴“Instead of Χριστοῦ, a few witnesses, probably under the influence of readings involving a similar expression in many witnesses at 2:2, read θεοῦ (of God). Before the text can be translated in some languages, it will be necessary to understand the relationship between the words ‘mystery’ and ‘of Christ.’ Bratcher and Nida (*A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 99) provide one possible model for translating: ‘God’s message about Christ, a message which has not been previously known.’ [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 420.]

⁵Kolossar 4,2

* –ρουντες I 33. 1241^{s*}. 1881 pc vg^{mss}; Or^{lat} (the imperative verb προσκαρτερεῖτε is replaced with the participle spelling προσκαρτεροῦντες in these manuscripts.)

* D*; Ambst (the prepositional phrase ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ is omitted by these manuscripts)

Kolossar 4,3

* ἐν παρρησίᾳ A (The prepositional phrase ἐν παρρησίᾳ before the infinitive λαλῆσαι)

* θεοῦ B* L 614 vg^{ms} sa^{mss} (θεοῦ replaces Χριστοῦ in these manuscripts)

* ον B F G vg^{ms} (δι’ ὃ, because of which, is replaced with δι’ ὃν, because of whom, in these manuscripts)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 529-530.]

on solid grounds as being the original wording of this part of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Internal History. The time / place references in these verses are minimal, but do contain some important references. Particularly important is the reference to Paul's being under arrest. He describes himself as being in 'chains' (δέδεμαι) and asks for prayer that God will help him proclaim the gospel effectively while imprisoned.⁶ Throughout our study we have worked upon the hypothesis that the most likely scenario for his imprisonment was Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast where Paul spent a little over two years under Roman imprisonment while awaiting the outcome of the charges brought against him by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem.⁷ The level of custody that Paul experienced here is described in Acts 23:31-26:32. Specific references to his imprisonment include:



Roman bema

Acts 23:35b (NRSV): "Then he [Felix, the Roman governor] ordered that he [Paul] be kept under guard in Herod's headquarters" (κελεύσας ἐν τῷ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρώδου φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτόν).

Acts 24:2a (NRSV): "When Paul had been summoned,..." (κληθέντος δὲ αὐτοῦ...).

Acts 24:23 (NRSV): "Then he [Felix, the Roman governor] ordered the centurion to keep him in custody, but to let him have some liberty and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care of his needs" (διαταξάμενος τῷ ἑκατοντάρχη τηρεῖσθαι αὐτόν ἔχειν τε ἄνεσιν καὶ μηδένα κωλύειν τῶν ἰδίων αὐτοῦ ὑπηρετεῖν αὐτῷ).

Acts 24:24 (NRSV): "Some days later when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him speak concerning faith in Christ Jesus" (Μετὰ δὲ ἡμέρας τινὰς παραγενόμενος ὁ Φῆλιξ σὺν Δρουσίλλῃ τῇ ἰδίᾳ γυναικὶ οὕσῃ Ἰουδαία μετεπέμψατο τὸν Παῦλον καὶ ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ περὶ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν πίστεως.).

Acts 24:27 (NRSV): "After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and since he wanted to grant the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison" (Διετίας δὲ πληρωθείσης ἔλαβεν διάδοχον ὁ Φῆλιξ Πόρκιον Φῆστον· θέλων τε χάριτα καταθέσθαι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὁ Φῆλιξ κατέλιπε τὸν Παῦλον δεδεμένον.).

Acts 25:6-7a (NRSV): "6 After he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 When he arrived,..." (6 Διατρίψας δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἡμέρας οὐ πλείους ὀκτῶ ἢ δέκα, καταβὰς εἰς Καισάρειαν, τῇ ἐπταύριον καθίσας ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἐκέλευσεν τὸν Παῦλον ἀχθῆναι. 7 παραγενομένου δὲ αὐτοῦ...).

Acts 25:21 (NRSV): "But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of his Imperial Majesty, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor" (τοῦ δὲ Παύλου ἐπικαλεσαμένου τηρηθῆναι αὐτόν εἰς τὴν τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ διαγνώσιν, ἐκέλευσα τηρεῖσθαι αὐτόν ἕως οὗ ἀναπέμψω αὐτόν πρὸς Καίσαρα.).

⁶“Prison” most frequently renders GK *phylakē*. The Greek term may refer to the action of guarding, the person who guards, a period of time for guarding (i.e., guard duty), or the place of guarding (the primary NT use). Also translated as ‘prison’ are GK *desmōtērion* and *tērēsis*. The former refers to a place of confinement, such as the places used for John the Baptist (Mt. 11:2), the apostles (Acts 5:21, 23), and Paul and Silas (16:26). The latter term (which is synonymous with *desmōtērion* in Acts 5:21, 23) occurs in Acts 5:18 in the phrase *en tērēsei dēmosia*, which the RSV and AV render ‘in the common prison’ (NEB ‘in official custody’). GK *dēmosia* may be either an adverb or an adjective; consequently, the apostles were either put in prison publicly or they were put into a public prison (i.e., a prison belonging to the government). In Col. 4:3 the AV ‘in bonds’ for GK *dēō* is perhaps more distinct and preferable to the RSV ‘in prison,’ since Paul in Col. 4:18 leaves no doubt that he is actually in chains (R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* [NCBC, repr 1981], p. 126). The part of *syndēō* in He. 13:3, rendered ‘in prison with them,’ implies a sharing in the sufferings of those in prison even if only by ‘exercising imaginative sympathy’ (F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews* [NICNT, 1964], p. 392).

⁷“Prisoner” most often translates GK *dēsmios*, which refers to persons either bound by chains or confined by walls. It applies to prisoners in general (e.g., Acts 16:25, 27; He. 10:34), to Paul in particular (Acts 23:18; 25:14, 27; 28:17), and also to Paul when he designates himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1; Philem. 1, 9; cf. 2 Tim. 1:8; also M. Barth, *Ephesians* [AB, 1974], I, 359–362).” [Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 3: 973–75. S.V., “Prison,” by G.L. Knapp.]

⁷This Caesarea was known as Caesarea Maritima, the city of Herod. Herod the Great built this port city in the later years of the first century before Christ (appx. 25-13 BCE). The city served as the seat of the Roman *praefecti* during the beginning of Christianity. It was the place of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius (cf. Acts 10), and Paul's lengthy imprisonment after his arrest in Jerusalem and prior to his being taken to Rome to stand before the Roman emperor Nero (Acts 23-26). In later centuries the city became of major center of Christian activity in the eastern Mediterranean world.

Acts 25:23 (NRSV): “So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and **Paul was brought in.**” (Τῆ οὖν ἑπαύριον ἔλθόντος τοῦ Ἀγρίππα καὶ τῆς Βερνίκης μετὰ πολλῆς φαντασίας καὶ εἰσελθόντων εἰς τὸ ἀκροατήριον σὺν τε χιλιάρχοις καὶ ἀνδράσιν τοῖς κατ’ ἐξοχὴν τῆς πόλεως καὶ κελεύσαντος τοῦ Φήστου ἦχθη ὁ Παῦλος.)

Acts 27:1 (NRSV): “When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, **they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius.**” (Ὡς δὲ ἐκρίθη τοῦ ἀποπλεῖν ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν Ἰταλίαν, παρεδίδουν τὸν τε Παῦλον καὶ τινὰς ἑτέρους δεσμώτας ἑκατοντάρχη ὀνόματι Ἰουλίῳ σπειρῆς Σεβαστῆς.)

From the picture that emerges out of these references one can see that Paul experienced a level of custody rather typical for Roman citizens of that time. He was placed in the custody of a Roman centurion who was responsible for Paul. The location of his imprisonment was the *praetorium* of Herod (ἐν τῷ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρώδου), i.e., the official residence of the governors in the city. The Roman military officer was personally responsible to keep the prison secure and also available at any time for appearing before the Roman governor. As Acts 24:23 suggests, Paul had some freedom and friends were permitted to bring him supplies and food. This relative freedom enabled Paul to receive friends, dictate letters etc. while waiting on the outcome of his trial.

Additionally, the indirect allusion to Christians using wisdom in relating to the non-Christian world around them carries with it some issues of the precise nature of feeling about Christians present in Colossae at the time of the writing of this letter in the late 50s of the first Christian century. Was there a hostile attitude? An attitude of indifference? One of curiosity? Gaining some insight here helps one develop a better understanding of Paul’s language of ‘redeeming the time’ (τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι). Although Paul was experiencing persecution largely from Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, the atmosphere in the Lycus valley toward Christianity doesn’t seem to be characterized by hostility from either the local Jewish leaders or from the Roman government. Although one cannot say with certainty that this was the situation, the mostly indirect signals from Colossians and Philemon suggest this to have been the case in the late 50s.

Literary Aspects:

As is always the case, the literary aspects play an important role in the interpretive process here.

Literary Form. Col. 4:2-6 stand as a part of the letter body, implying that the specific content is dictated by the perceived needs of the initial readers of the letter. Additionally, the passage falls under the genre of epistolary *paraenesis*, i.e., moral admonitions to the readers regarding issues in daily living. This is the more formally presented moral admonition, in contrast to random ethical oriented admonitions presented prior to 3:1 in the letter.

Literary Setting. From the outline on the right, one can sense better the literary context for 4:2-6. It stands as the final paraenetical segment in 3:1-4:6. As such it is built off the foundational principles in 3:1-4 advocating the Christian life as seeking the things above and not the things on the earth.

Additionally, many scholars call attention to the common language



Herod’s Palace in Caesarea
Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2
Superscriptio: 1:1
Adscriptio: 1:2a
Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12
Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20
Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul’s Ministry 1: 1:24-29
Paul’s Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15
Christian Living 2: 2:16-19
Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4
Christian Behavior: 3:5-11
Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1
Husband/Wife: 3:18-19
Father/Children: 3:20-21
Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9
Greetings: 4:10-17
Closing: 4:18
Letter Validation: 4:18a
Prayer Request: 4:18b
Benedictio: 4:19c

of 3:16-17⁸ and 4:2-6. The worship tone of both, especially with the emphasis upon corporate prayer seems to form a ‘ring’ around the family code section in 3:18-4:1. Although all the implications of this are not clear, at least the instruction about family life in the Christian home is set in the context of the worship of God by the church. An integral connection between home and church is highlighted. One can’t function well without the other. And both need to nourish the other in a unified desire to honor God and to advance the cause of Christ.

The Christian Life Col. 3:1-4:6
Foundation 3:1-4
Putting to death 3:5-11
Getting dressed 3:12-17
Building a Christian family 3:18-4:1
Establishing a Christian community 4:2-6

The Christian life in community includes both the corporate community and the Christian family as a part of the larger community. All of these segments come off the foundational principle set forth at the beginning.

Also, Paul frequently closes out the paraenesis material in his letters with a ‘random’ section of moral admonition.⁹ Thus this passage signals that the apostle is quickly coming to the end of his letter, and is seeking to ‘tie together some loose strings’ before concluding his letter to the Colossians. Given this aspect, one should be hesitant to see a close internal connection between the admonitions found inside the passage.

Literary Structure:

The visual presentation of the thought flow through the block diagram of the original Greek text highlights the inner connectedness of the primary and secondary ideas in the text. The English translation of that text illustrates this structure in translation.

4.2 With prayer
53 **persevere**
watching
in it
with thanksgiving,
4.3 praying
at the same time also
for us,
that God may open to us a door
for the Word
for me to speak the mystery of Christ,
because of which I also am in chains,
4.4 that I will make it clear
as it is necessary for me to speak.

4.5 In wisdom
54 **be walking**
toward those on the outside
redeeming the opportunity.

55 4.6 **Let your word be**
always
with grace,
seasoned with salt,
so that you may know
how it is necessary for you to answer each one.

Clearly the text divides naturally into two units: statement 53 (vv. 2-4) and statements 54-55 (vv. 5-6).

⁸NRSV: “16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

16 ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ· διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ψαλμοῖς, ὕμνοις, ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ἐν χάριτι, ἄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ· 17 καὶ πᾶν ὅ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ.

⁹“As in other Pauline letters this indicates that the letter is drawing to a close and matches the prayer of the opening (1:3, 9–10/4:2–4; Rom. 1:9–10/15:30–32; Phil. 1:9–11/4:6; 1 Thes. 1:2–3/5:17, 25; 2 Thes. 1:3/3:1–2; Phm. 4–6/22; also Eph. 1:15–23/6:18–20); once again Eph. 6:18–20 is particularly close to Col. 4:2–4.” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 261.]

This has occasionally been labeled by commentators as 1 “Talking to God about others” and 2 “Talking to others about God.” Clearly the first emphasis is upon prayer, and the need to pray with insight and alertness. It also includes intercessory prayer especially for the apostle that he can effectively use the opportunity of imprisonment to advance the cause of Christ.

The second unit in vv. 5-6 stresses relationships of believers to the outside world. Wisdom is to be used in relating to them and wise speech also. In so doing a solid Christian witness can be presented to non-believers.

Exegesis of the Text:

The twofold exegesis of the text is based upon the above understanding of the natural divisions in the text.

Using prayer, vv. 2-4:

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4 so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

2 Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε, γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, 3 προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου, λαλήσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι’ ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, 4 ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλήσαι.

Important to examine in comparison is the parallel text in Eph. 6:18-20:

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

18 διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως, προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκαρτερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων, 19 καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα μοι δοθῇ λόγος ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 20 ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν αλύσει, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλήσαι.

Coming at basically the same place in the Ephesian letter as does 4:2-6 in the Colossian letter,¹⁰ this text stands as a companion expression to the Colossians admonition on praying. Both advocate prayer as critical to the life of the believing community.¹¹ Both also appeal to the readers to pray for the imprisoned apostle Paul to be able to speak with boldness the ‘mystery’ of the gospel / of Christ. Thus as both letters were read to believers in the Lycus Valley, this doubled emphasis on intercessory prayer for the apostle would find stronger emphasis.

Periodically throughout the letter Paul has emphasized the role of prayer for the community of believers.

¹⁰Note even further the parallel concerning Tychicus that follows in both letters. This will be explored further in the next study in Colossians:

Col. 4:7-9 (NRSV): “7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.”

7 Τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τυχικός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος ἐν κυρίῳ, 8 ὃν ἔπεμψα πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἵνα γνῶτε τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ παρακαλέσῃ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, 9 σὺν Ὀνησίμῳ τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ, ὅς ἐστιν ἐξ ὑμῶν· πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὧδε.

Eph. 6:21-22 (NRSV): “21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts.”

21 Ἴνα δὲ εἰδῆτε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ κατ’ ἐμέ, τί πράσσω, πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τυχικός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος ἐν κυρίῳ, 22 ὃν ἔπεμψα πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἵνα γνῶτε τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ παρακαλέσῃ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν.

¹¹“As the letter opening began with assurance of Paul’s prayer for the Colossians, so the main section concludes with Paul’s encouragement that they should be faithful in prayer, for him as well (4:3). Here again we may take it for granted that this was no mere formality but an expression of the indispensability of prayer for Paul and the early Pauline mission; even in this letter we are still in the earliest years when traditions were being created and not merely parroted.” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 261]

He stressed at the beginning his thanksgiving and intercession for the Colossians (cf. 1:3-14) as an example to the community of believers. In 2:7, thanksgiving (περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ) becomes the foundation of spiritual growth for the community. The seeking of the ‘things above’ (τὰ ἄνω) in 3:1-4 carries with it the reaching out to God in ongoing prayer, as the basis for living the Christian life. The very direct emphasis here on praying becomes climatic and something of a summation of the mentioning of praying up to this point in the letter. Again in 4:2, prayer (τῇ προσευχῇ) and thanksgiving (ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ) are linked together here.

One should note the focus on the believing community as a group with this appeal.¹² Not just in individual prayer in devotional practice, but the corporate community of the church especially should give high priority to praying for others.

Core admonition. The core admonition in Colossians 4:2 is simply “Devote yourselves to prayer” (τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε). Peter O’Brien (WBC) provides helpful comment here:¹³

The congregation is exhorted to constant prayer. The verb προσκαρτερέω, which means to “adhere to,” or “persist in,” came to be used of a boat that always stands ready for someone (Mark 3:9), or an activity that one was devoted to or busily engaged in. It was in this latter sense that it came to be employed to denote continuance in prayer (Acts 1:14; Rom 12:12; Col 4:2; cf Acts 2:42, 46) and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4; on the term and its cognate προσκαρτέρησις, “perseverance,” “patience,” see BAG, 715, Grundmann, TDNT 3, 618–20, and R. Kerkhoff, *Das unablässige Gebet. Beiträge zur Lehre vom immerwährenden Beten im Neuen Testament* [Munich: Zink, 1954] 39, 40). Here the injunction suggests determination in prayer, with the resolve not to give up (Luke 11:5–13) or grow weary (Luke 18:1–8). The content of this prayer (τῇ προσευχῇ) is not specifically mentioned, so it is sometimes assumed that all types of prayer are covered by the term. However, although προσευχή is, on occasion, used of prayer in general, in both Old and New Testaments it regularly signifies petition (1 Sam 7:27; cf. v 29; 2 Kings 19:4; 20:5; Pss 4:1; 6:9, etc; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:31; 12:5; Rom 1:10; 15:30; James 5:17; in many other instances in the Greek Bible where it has been argued that προσευχή, “prayer,” and its cognate verb προσεύχομαι, to “pray,” bear a general sense of prayer, a case can be made for the rendering “petition”). Such a meaning fits the immediate context well. Since thanksgiving is to be an accompaniment of this prayerful activity then the thanksgiving itself (ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ) is not included in the term προσευχή (“prayer”; against Conzelmann, TDNT 9, 414). Also the following participle προσευχόμενοι (“praying,” v 3), which spells out the content of Paul’s prayer request of the Colossians for himself and other messengers of the gospel, directs our attention to a particular form of petition, that is, intercession. The Colossian Christians are to persevere in petitionary prayer.

At the beginning of the letter,¹⁴ Paul affirmed his continual praying for the Colossians with thanksgiving and petition. Now he urges the Colossians to engage in the same kind of praying so that God’s work can advance. Every kind of praying is most likely in mind with petition and intercession especially in focus. The Ephesian parallel clearly specifies this (Eph. 6:18): “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints” (διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως, προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκαρτερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων). When the church prays under the leadership of the Holy Spirit,¹⁵ as Paul admonishes in Ephesians, it will voice the proper kinds of prayers to the Lord.

Expansion elements. He qualifies this core admonition with the encouragement to be watchful in their praying and to base their praying in thanksgiving: “keeping alert in it with thanksgiving” (γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν

¹²The second person plural form of the Greek verbal expressions uniformly stresses the group responsibility. Additionally the connection of Eph. 6:18-20 to the unquestionable corporate worship emphasis in vv. 14-20 further stresses corporate intercessory prayer by the believing community.

¹³Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 238.

¹⁴Col. 1:3 (NRSV): “In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,…” Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι

Col. 1:9-10 (NRSV): “9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.” 9 Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ, 10 περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ ἀξαναόμνοι τῇ ἐπίγνωσει τοῦ θεοῦ,

¹⁵“Praying in the Spirit” here (διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως, προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι) has absolutely nothing to do with glossolalia or some kind of weird manner of praying. Instead, the apostle stresses the importance of following the leadership of the Holy Spirit in both the kind of prayers offered and the content of those prayers. By this we will avoid improper praying that God cannot honor.

εὐχαριστία). The sense of watchfulness (γρηγοροῦντες) most likely alludes to the expectation of the return of Christ and thus provides some of the motivation for praying.¹⁶ We engage earnestly in prayer because of our expectancy that Jesus is coming again! Also we are careful to preserve the purity of our commitment against corrupting influences from false teachers as a secondary emphasis here.

This expectancy is based in thanksgiving: ἐν εὐχαριστία. This is a repeated theme of Paul in the letter: cf. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2. A huge motivation for and also content in praying is our gratitude to God for His blessings. When thanksgiving permeates our praying we will come before God in prayer more properly and our prayers will tend to be on target. But one should note that here ἐν εὐχαριστία (with thanksgiving) is attached to the participle γρηγοροῦντες (being watchful) rather to the verb προσκατερέβετε (devote yourselves to). Thus thanksgiving and watchfulness are closely linked. Given the eschatological thrust of γρηγοροῦντες, our gratitude to God is now targeting God's blessings in the return of Christ. This expands the concept of gratitude in the letter from what God has done in salvation to what God will do in the second coming of Christ. Additionally one should note that Paul's concept of gratitude all through the letter is not centered on what God does for 'me' but on 'us' as the collective community of faith. An egocentric emphasis turns gratitude into something negative rather than positive, by becoming a subtle expression of individual pride.¹⁷



The apostle attached great importance to intercessory prayer for his ministry by the different communities of faith connected to him.¹⁸ Helpful commentary on this request is provided by O'Brien:

The apostle's exhortation to persevering prayer is immediately followed by a request for the intercession of the Colossians for himself and his coworkers. He offers petition regularly for them (1:3, 9) and now asks that as they pray for the coming of the kingdom they will at the same time (ἅμα denotes the coincidence of two actions in time, BDF para. 425[2], BAG, 42) consistently remember him before the throne of grace (προσευχόμενοι, "praying," a present tense, suggests an ongoing intercessory activity). Clearly he attached great importance to this regular, reciprocal intercession by his converts and other Christians in the gentile mission since he appeals for this prayerful support elsewhere (Rom 15:30–32; Eph 6:19; Phil 1:19; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1, 2, and Phlm 22). He earnestly desired their understanding and help in his struggle for the gospel and there was no better way to express this than by intercessory prayer. The request is that they might pray "for us" (περὶ ἡμῶν, which corresponds to the περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, "praying for you," of 1:8; cf v 9 and note the similar correspondence at 2 Thess 3:1 and 1:11; see Riesenfeld, TDNT 6, 54, and Wiles, Prayers, 259–84), a reference that no doubt includes his friends and colleagues mentioned later in the chapter who were messengers of the gospel (perhaps Timothy, [1:1] and Epaphras [4:12, 13] are especially in view; so Lightfoot, 229). But it is clear that Paul is thinking primarily of his own need for he slips into the first person singular later in the sentence ("for which I am in chains, that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should," vv 3b, 4).¹⁹

The goal of such intercession for Paul and his associates is clear: "that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should" (ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξη ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου, λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, 4 ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι). Paul did not ask the church to pray that his imprisonment would be lightened, nor

¹⁶“Watch” is used frequently in the NT in an eschatological context in order to call one to an action that is appropriate for the impending arrival of the Lord at the end of time.² It is also used, however, in order to admonish to watchfulness against false teachings (cf. Acts 20:31; 1 Pet 5:8). These are not mutually exclusive alternatives, not even in view of Col, because the readers of this epistle are also waiting for the return of their Lord (see 3:1–4 and Comment I to 3:1–4:5). Still, in the face of the possible threat to the Colossian community that Paul dealt with in detail in 2:6–20, it was of special concern to him to refer to it again at the close of the epistle.” [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 452.]

¹⁷Compare James 4:3 for improper praying based on selfishness: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.” αἰτεῖτε καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε, διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε.

¹⁸“In addition he earnestly requests his readers to intercede for him in his costly work of spreading the gospel (Rom 15:30–32; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:19; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1, 2; Phlm 22).” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 261]

¹⁹Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 240-241.

that he would be released from prison.²⁰ Instead, his concern was that the church would pray that God would open new opportunities²¹ for him to speak the gospel message while in Roman custody.²² This is virtually the same request as found in Eph. 6:19-20: “Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.” 19 καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα μοι δοθῆ ἰσχυρὸς λόγος ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 20 ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι. Notice also that the ‘mystery of Christ’ in Colossians equals the ‘mystery of the gospel’ in Ephesians.

Paul was concerned that he could make known the salvation in Christ that was unknown and hidden from his Roman captors. He felt strong compulsion from God to do this: Col. 4:4, “as I should” (ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι); Eph. 6:20, “as I must speak” (ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι). Central to his prayer was the God would help him φανερώσω αὐτὸ, *make clear the mystery about Christ*. Most preachers would do well to make this their prayer also, that God would help them be able to explain the deep truths about Christ clearly and understandably to others. The comparative phrase beginning with ὡς stresses that speaking clearly and understandably φανερώσω is a divine mandate, not a human option.

Additionally, the idea is not that of simplifying the Gospel down to the absolute basics! Instead, it is being able to communicate profound spiritual truths about the Gospel and Christ to people in ways that enable them to understand clearly not just ‘the basics’ but also the ‘hidden’ truths (τὸ μυστήριον) connected to the Gospel and to Christ.²³ Of course, that implies that the preacher has developed enough spiritual maturity and insight into the Gospel to himself / herself understand them. One can’t explain to others what one doesn’t understand! As one who has listened to countless sermons over the past five plus decades, I have wanted to stand up and shout for joy on those rare occasions when I’ve heard a preacher accomplish what Paul was

²⁰This is contra the view of a few older commentators who saw the ‘opened door’ as an image of the prison door, that would allow Paul to leave prison. Barth is correct in rejecting this view as not appropriate to the context here; cf. footnote 7: “Comp., for example, H. A. W. Meyer (p. 407); E. Schweizer (p. 172); A. Lindemann (p. 69).—This explication is hardly fitting, since Paul sees the fulfillment of his missionary charge in his suffering (comp. Comment I to 1:24–2:5).” [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008).]

²¹“The image of an open door turns up in Hellenistic thought (Epictetus employs it in the sense of a person being free to go anywhere; ‘opened doors’ is also a figure of literary activity, cf. Jeremias, TDNT 3, 174) as well as in later Judaism where man opens the door to God by repenting, while God opens the door to man by giving him opportunities for intercession or repentance, or by granting grace (Str-B 1, 458; 2, 728; 3, 484, 485, 631; Jeremias, TDNT 3, 174). Within the New Testament this picture of an open door, which is used in missionary contexts, denotes the provision of opportunity. God opens a door for the missionary by giving him a field in which to work (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) and he opens a door of faith to Gentiles so that they might believe (Acts 14:27; elsewhere ἀνοίγω is used of the opening of the eyes, Luke 24:31; Acts 26:18; of the understanding, Luke 24:45; of the heart, Acts 16:14; and of Scripture, Luke 24:32; Acts 17:3). In Colossians 4:3 God is to be petitioned to open a door for the gospel message (several commentators, both ancient and modern, on the basis of Eph 6:19, have taken this to mean ‘the door of our speech,’ i.e. ‘our mouth,’ cf. Beza, Bengel; note also Lohmeyer, 161, who understands it of access by Paul to the right thing to say. But this interpretation is less likely) — this of course also means a door for the messenger, but here the emphasis falls upon the dynamic, almost personal, character of the Word (cf 2 Thess 3:1, a prayer request, ‘Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may run and be honored’). Paul is concerned for an opportunity for effective evangelism; and it is just possible that he is asking them to pray for his release from prison (so many commentators; cf Phlm 22, and on Paul’s imprisonment see xlix–liv). On the other hand, even when he was at liberty such doors did not open up to him automatically (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) and the apostle did not regard imprisonment as a serious interruption of his missionary work (Phil 1:12, 13; so Caird, 210). At the conclusion of the Book of Acts (28:30, 31) Luke indicates an open door was set before Paul in Rome. The opportunities were considerable though special wisdom was called for (cf Bruce, 298).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 240.]

²²Note his similar requests in other letters:

Rom. 15:30-32 (NRSV): “30 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.”

30 Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ πνεύματος συναγωνίσασθαι μοι ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, 31 ἵνα ῥυθθῶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπειθούντων ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ ἡ διακονία μου ἢ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ εὐπρόσδεκτος τοῖς ἁγίοις γένηται, 32 ἵνα ἐν χαρᾷ ἔλθω πρὸς ὑμᾶς διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ συναναπαύσωμαι ὑμῖν.

2 Thess. 3:1-2 (NRSV): “1 Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, 2 and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith.”

Τὸ λοιπὸν προσεύχεσθε, ἀδελφοί, περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου τρέχη καὶ δοξάζεται καθὼς καὶ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, 2 καὶ ἵνα ῥυθθῶμεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀτόπων καὶ πονηρῶν ἀνθρώπων, οὐ γὰρ πάντων ἡ πίστις.

²³One of the greatest complements that a preacher can receive is “You really made that easy to understand! I have wondered what it meant until today.”

seeking here. Such genuine spiritual insight from the pulpit is exceedingly rare in our day, unfortunately.

Building good relations, vv. 5-6:

5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

5 Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἕξω, τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι. 6 ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἄλατι ἠρτυμένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

The second set of admonitions targets Christian relationships to the non-Christian world. The New Testament in general places importance on the reaction of the non-Christian world to believers.²⁴ The reputation of Christians in the non-Christian world is important. To be sure, the church can't control how the rest of the world views us, but the New Testament is adamant that believers do nothing to legitimize negative attitudes toward Christianity.

The first core admonition is simply: "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders" (Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἕξω). The idea of 'walking toward' (περιπατεῖτε πρὸς...) underscores behavior in regard to.²⁵ The outsiders mentioned here are those outside the Christian community of believers.²⁶ The conduct of believers toward non-believers is to take place 'in wisdom.'²⁷

Expansion elements. A major means of achieving this is by "making the most of the time" (τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι). Bratcher and Nida offer a helpful explanation:²⁸

The participle that follows is literally "buying out, redeeming"; only here and in the parallel Eph 5:16 is it used in the sense of making good use of. Most commentators and translators give the same meaning as it appears in TEV and RSV. Some, however, have understood the text to mean "redeeming the time from the power of Evil," but this seems most unlikely. The Colossians are enjoined to seize and use every opportunity of witnessing to their faith to the non-Christian society in which they live.

Believers are to utilize every opportunity to present a good witness to their non-Christian neighbors by both word and deed. Spiritual sensitivity is required to be able to do this correctly. Thus τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι does not mean 'making efficient use of one's schedule.' Nor is it alluding to some exotic use of time. Clearly in this context Paul encourages the Colossians to utilize every opportunity for a positive witness to the Gospel that God provided them day by day. The noun τὸν καιρὸν refers to opportunities that arise in the passing of

²⁴"Elsewhere in the exhortatory material of the NT the reaction of non-Christians to the behavior of believers plays a significant role: (a) the latter are to live in such a way that God's name is not dishonored, and (b) no occasion of stumbling should be given which would prevent men and women being saved (see 1 Cor 10:32, 33; Phil 2:14, 15; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:11, 12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1; Tit 2:8; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:1, 16; cf van Unnik, *Judentum*, 221–34)." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 242.]

²⁵"The verb act is the same one used in 1:10, 2:6, 3:7, indicating way of life, behavior, conduct. Be wise in the way you act may be rendered as 'behave wisely,' or 'use wisdom in the way in which you conduct yourself,' or 'be wise in the way in which you live.'" [Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Helps for translators; UBS handbook series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 100]

²⁶"The expression 'outsiders' corresponds to the rabbinic *ha-ḥiṣṣônîm*, 'those who are outside,' that is, either heretics or 'the people of the land'; cf. 2 Macc 1:16; Thucyd. 5, 14, 3, and note Str-B 3,362, Behm, TDNT 2, 575, 576, and BAG, 279) carries a semitechnical meaning and refers to non-Christians generally, especially pagans (1 Cor 5:12, 31; 1 Thess 4:12; cf. 1 Tim 3:7; 2 Clem 13:1). Elsewhere in the exhortatory material of the NT the reaction of non-Christians to the behavior of believers plays a significant role: (a) the latter are to live in such a way that God's name is not dishonored, and (b) no occasion of stumbling should be given which would prevent men and women being saved (see 1 Cor 10:32, 33; Phil 2:14, 15; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:11, 12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1; Tit 2:8; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:1, 16; cf van Unnik, *Judentum*, 221–34)." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 246.]

²⁷"'Wisdom' (σοφία), as we have noted, turns up in several important contexts of Colossians (1:9, 28; 2:3 and 3:16; see on these verses). The wisdom which the apostle sets forth is fundamentally different from that propounded by the false teachers. The latter is but an empty show of wisdom (λόγος ... σοφίας, 2:23). Here 'wisdom,' which has to do with a knowledge of God's will (1:9) and walking worthily of the Lord (1:10; cf. Wilckens, TDNT 7, 523), is essentially practical and realistic. Like the Philippians (2:15, 'so that you may become blameless and pure ... shining like stars in the universe') these readers are to be godly, giving no occasion for valid criticism (cf. 1 Cor 10:32, 'Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God'). They should be tactful on the one hand, yet bold in their Christian witness to outsiders on the other (several commentators, including von Soden, 68, Moule, 133, and Ernst, 239, in the light of the immediate context, consider the apostle has missionary responsibilities in view; Merk, Handeln, 224, following van Unnik, *Judentum*, 228, recognizes there is no explicit basis mentioned but thinks the motivation is drawn from the missionary possibilities in the situation)." [O'Brien, *Ibid.*]

²⁸[Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Helps for translators; UBS handbook series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 100]

time (χρόνος).²⁹ It includes one's Christian actions as well as words, in light of being attached to the verb περιπατεῖτε that encompasses the whole of one's living.

The parallel passage in Eph. 5:15-16 presents the admonition somewhat differently: "15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 **making the most of the time, because the days are evil,**" 15 Βλέπετε οὖν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε, μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ' ὡς σοφοί, 16 **ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν.**³⁰ Believers are to 'walk' as wise people who 'redeem the time.' But the motivating basis for this is that the days are evil, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν. That is, believers recognize that they live in a world dominated completely by evil. This motivates caution and careful assessment of every action and word to be sure they reflect Christian values rather than worldly values. Effort must be made to prevent our lifestyle from being contaminated by the evil of the time we live in.

The second core admonition focuses on our speech: "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone," ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι. In relating to our non-Christian friends and neighbors our speech plays a central role in developing positive relationships. The expression ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν focuses on our taking or speaking. The generalized nature of ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν includes our speaking in general, whether public or private, formal or informal.³¹ The admonition then addresses human speaking and insists on it possessing certain qualities. Contextually, the thrust is the speech of Christians here.

The duration of these qualities of speaking is πάντοτε, *always*.³² This kind of speaking should typify the believer's conversations consistently without interruption.³³ Clearly adverbs like this one underscore the idealistic nature of the admonition. As believers this is the level of speaking that we must strive for continuously without let up.

Expansion elements. The apostle indicates that our speech must always (πάντοτε) have two fundamental qualities: grace and salt.

1. Our speech must be gracious: ἐν χάριτι. The precise meaning of this expression is debated among contemporary scholars. It means either that 1) our speech is friendly and inviting toward others, or that 2) our

²⁹καίρος, οὐ, ὁ (Hes.+; loanw. in rabb.)...

"b. a moment or period as especially appropriate *the right, proper, favorable time* ἐν καιρῷ *at the right time* (X., An. 3, 1, 39; Diod S 36, 7, 2; Appian, Bell. Civ. 3, 8 §29; SIG 1268 [Praecepta Delphica II, 6; III B.C.]) **Mt 24:45; Lk 12:42** (cp. on both Ps 103:27, w. v.l.). καιρῷ (Thu. 4, 59, 3 v.l.; Diog. L. 1, 41) **Lk 20:10** (v.l. ἐν κ.). τῷ καιρῷ **Mk 12:2**. ὁ καιρὸς ὁ ἐμός, ὁ καιρὸς ὁ ὑμέτερος *the proper time for me (you)* **J 7:6, 8** (Eunap., Vi. Iambl. p. 459 Didot: the worker of miracles acts ὅταν καιρὸς ᾦ). νῦν κ. ταῦτα ὑμᾶς μαθεῖν οὐκ ἔστιν now is not the time for you to learn this AcPl Ha 1, 26 (Just., D. 8, 1 ἄ νῦν κ. οὐκ ἔστι λέγειν al.).— καιρὸν λαβεῖν *find a favorable time, seize the opportunity* (Lysias, C. Agor. 6; Cleanthes [III B.C.]: Stoic. I no. 573; Diod S 2, 6, 5; EpArist 248; Jos., Bell. 1, 527, Ant. 4, 10; cp. PTebt 332, 9). καιρὸν μεταλαβεῖν (s. μεταλαμβάνω 2) **Ac 24:25**. λαβεῖν κ. εὐθετον *find a convenient opportunity* Pol 13:1. κ. ἔχειν have opportunity (Thu. 1, 42, 3; Pla., Ep. 7, 324b; Plut., Lucull. 501 [16, 4]; PFlor 259, 3; 1 Macc 15:34; Jos., Ant. 16, 73; 335; Ath., R. 23 p. 77, 6; Did., Gen. 112, 10) **Gal 6:10; Hb 11:15; 2 Cl 16:1; ISm 9:1; I Ro 2:1**. ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχειν **Rv 12:12**. ἐξαγοράζεσθαι τὸν κ. *make the most of the opportunity* **Col 4:5; Eph 5:16** (s. ἐξαγοράζω 2). On **Ro 12:11** v.l. s. δουλεύω 2aβ and b. κατὰ κ. **Ro 5:6** is more naturally construed with ἀπέθανεν than with ἀσεβῶν (cp. κατὰ καιρὸν θεριζόμενος reaped in its proper time Job 5:26)." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 497-98.

³⁰Col. 4:3 and Eph. 5:16 are the only two occurrences of the phrase ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν in the entire New Testament. Only Dan. 2:8 (LXX: καιρὸν ὑμεῖς ἐξαγοράζετε, *trying to gain time*) contains an expression similar in terminology but with different meaning, in all of ancient literature.

³¹Of the 328 uses of λόγος in the New Testament, just ten of them refer to speech in general: 1 Cor. 1:5, 2:4, 14:9; 2 Cor. 6:7, 8:7, 10:10, 11:6; Col. 4:6, 1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:8.

³²πάντοτε adv. (on the formation Schwyzer I 629) of time (Hellenist. and Mod. Gk.; Dionys. Hal.+; Peripl. Eryth. 29; Epict., Ench. 14, 1; Dio Chrys. 15 [32], 37; Herodian 3, 9, 8; Artem. 4, 20; Plut.; Athen.; Diog. L.; OGI 458, 76 [I B.C.], SIG 814, 37 [67 A.D.]; BGU 1123, 8 [I B.C.]; PGiss 17, 4; 72, 11 [II A.D.]; Wsd 11:21; 19:18; TestSol, Test12Patr; JosAs 7:6; SyrBar 12:2; Jos., Bell. 3, 42; Just., D. 49, 7; 93, 4; Ath., R. 1 p. 49, 1 al.—The Atticists preferred ἐκάστοτε, διαπαντός, or αἰεὶ [Phryn. 103 Lob.] *always, at all times* **Mt 26:11ab; Mk 14:7ab; Lk 15:31; 18:1; J 6:34; 7:6** (seven times in J); **Ro 1:10; 1 Cor 1:4; 15:58; 2 Cor 2:14** (27 times in Paul); **Hb 7:25** (not found in Ac and Cath. Epistles; B-D-F §105; cp. Rob. 300); Dg 11:4; IEph 4:2; Hv 1, 1, 7 (24 times in Hermas).—B. 984. DELG s.v. πᾶς. 35–41. M-M." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 755.]

³³The final exhortation explicitly envisages a church in communication with those around it, not cut off in a 'holy huddle' speaking only 'the language of Zion' to insiders (contrast Eph. 4:29), but engaged in regular conversation with others, and in such a way as to allow plenty opportunity to bear testimony to their faith." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 266.

speech reflects the grace of God that has transformed our lives and thus guides our speaking.

Contextually we should not forget that the admonition in verse six stands in parallel to the previous one in verse five. This clearly defines believers' actions toward 'outsiders,' that is, to non-believers. The parallelism then reflects both outward behavior (περιπατεῖτε) and speaking (ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν). This context thus helps define the precise meaning of the qualities of our speaking, beginning with ἐν χάριτι.

This becomes the basis of the two possible explanations of ἐν χάριτι.³⁴ What emerges then is the meaning that the believer's 'gracious' speaking to non-believers should be a reflection of the impact of God's grace in his / her life. Our behavior toward the outside world should make the most of every opportunity for a positive witness to that world of the life changing presence of the Gospel (v. 5). This behavior must also include our speaking to outsiders (v. 6).

Gracious speaking stands in contrast to harsh and confrontational speaking. The believer is not to be confrontational or 'hard to get along with.' This is true even when believers have to stand firm in their spiritual convictions. Deep convictions can be shared graciously, and don't have to be expressed with harshness.

2. Our speech must be salty: ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος. The picture of 'salty language' in English conveys the opposite of what Paul has in mind with his use of the image of salt connected to speaking. Clearly the expression has a figurative meaning, rather than a literal meaning. Additionally, salt's role (ἄλατι) is clearly defined as 'seasoning' (ἡρτυμένος) our speech.³⁵

In the two other places in the New Testament with ἄλας (salt) and to season (ἀρτύω) used together -- Mk. 9:50 and Luke 14:34 -- the meaning of ἀρτύω is to add something to ἄλας, which has become μωρανθῆ (tasteless), so that its flavor and capacity to season is restored. In the rhetorical question setting of the use of the two terms in the two gospels, the point is made by Jesus that nothing can be added to salt in that condition which will restore its usefulness. Thus salt in these two passages refers not just to the disciple's speech but to his/her entire life. This usage is somewhat connected to the better known saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount at Matt. 5:13,

Ἵμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἄλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἄλας μωρανθῆ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

Paul's use of the image of salt in connection with speaking is based more on the general use of this figure of speech in the surrounding world. James Dunn proposes an explanation that challenges most of us today:³⁶

This slightly unexpected sense of agreeable speech is enhanced by the addition, ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος. The image is clear: salt that seasons, that is, makes more interesting what would otherwise be bland to the taste (Job 6:6; Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34; BAGD s.v. ἀρτύω). It was an obvious and familiar idiom: Timon (third century bc) calls the speech of the Academics ἀνάλιτος, "unsalted, insipid" (BAGD s.v. ἄλας 2); Plutarch speaks of a pastime

³⁴It is not possible to decide precisely what is meant by *en chariti* (literally: in grace). It is also possible here, as already in 3:16, that *charis* means the 'friendly,' 'charming' tone of speech. That does not need to mean that an 'ingratiating manner of speech' is recommended to the Colossians (cf. E. Haupt, p. 165). We would do more justice to the author of Col in this case if we understood the friendliness of speech requested by him in 3:12 as a manifestation of the positive behavior of the 'new self,' such as compassion, goodness, humility, mildness, and patience. This friendliness would then be an acknowledgment of the friendliness of God or of the Messiah (cf. Notes to 3:12). The omission of the article before *charis* (in the Greek text) cannot exclude the alternate interpretation that *charis* should be understood as 'grace,' as Eph 2:5 demonstrates. Although both interpretations are not mutually exclusive, this interpretation is probably preferable, because then there is a contextual parallel in vv 2-4/5 + 6, which corresponds to the structural parallel in these verses. In Col, 'grace of God,' 'gospel,' 'word of truth,' 'word of God,' and 'secret' are synonymous concepts (cf. 1:15/1:6/1:25/1:26), and thus, analogously to the 'exhortation' regarding the word of Paul and his co-workers in v 3, so here also regarding the word of the Colossians, the point is that the decisive factor lies in one's own speech, which is to be determined by 'grace,' thus by 'the secret.'" [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 456-57.]

³⁵ἀρτύω fut. ἀρτύσω. Pass.: fut. ἀρτυθήσομαι; pf. ἡρτυμαι (Hom.+; Polyb 15, 25, 2; Jos., Bell. 2, 614) *gener. 'prepare' w. connotation of skillful use of material.* Of food preparation **to add condiments to someth., season** (Hippocr.; Aristot., EN 3, 13 p. 1118a, 29 τὰ ὄψα; Theophr., De Odor. 51 [Fgm. 4, 11] ἡρτυμένος οἶνος, cp. SSol 8:2 Sym.; Athen. 3, 79, 113b; PTebt 375, 27; POxy 1454, 4) lit. *season, salt Mk 9:50; Lk 14:34* (JWackernagel, TLZ 33, 1908, 36). Fig., λόγος ἄλατι ἡρτυμένος *speech seasoned w. salt to make it interesting and fruitful Col 4:6* (s. MDibelius, Hdb. ad loc.).—DELG s.v. ἀραρίσκω. M-M." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 137.]

³⁶Dunn, *op.cit.*, 266.

or business “seasoned with the salt of conversation” and of wit as “the tastiest condiment of all,” called by some “graciousness” (χάριτας, *Moralia* 514E-F, 685A, cited by Lohse 168 n. 39); in Latin sales Attici means “Attic wit” (e.g., Cicero, *Ad familiares* 9.15.2, cited by Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 175 n. 22; see also Wolter 212).¹ The conversation envisaged, then, should be agreeable and “never insipid” (NEB/REB), “with a flavour of wit” (JB/NJB). “Those who are the salt of the earth [cf. Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:49–50; Luke 14:34–35] may reasonably be expected to have some savour about their language” (Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 175); cf. Ignatius, *Magnesian* 10:2: “Be salted in him [Christ].”

The picture is as far as we can imagine from that of the Christian who has no interest in affairs outside those of faith or church and so no “small talk,” no ability to maintain an interesting conversation. In contrast, it envisages opportunities for lively interchanges with non-Christians on topics and in a style which could be expected to find a positive resonance with the conversation partners. It would not be conversation which has “gone bad,” but conversation which reflects the attractiveness of character displayed above all by Christ. Moreover, such advice envisages a group of Christians in a sufficiently positive relation with the surrounding community for such conversations to be natural, a group not fearful or threatened, but open to and in positive relationship with its neighbors (even as “outsiders,” 4:5). Nor is there any hint of the persecution which is attested in other New Testament letters written to churches in Asia Minor (1 Pet. 4:12–19; Rev. 2:9–11, 13, etc.; the tone of 1 Pet. 3:15 is notably different in this respect), a fact which again suggests an earlier date. Rather, the picture evoked is one of social interaction and involvement in wider (Colossian) community affairs. Here, evidently, was a church not on the defensive against powerful forces organized against it, but expected to hold its own in the social setting of marketplace, baths, and meal table and to win attention by the attractiveness of its life and speech.

Thus our speaking with non-believers, especially regarding our religious faith, needs to be ‘salty’ in the sense of knowing how to present our faith in understandable ways that the non-believer finds interesting, and hopefully appealing. Literally, it needs to be ‘tasty’ to the non-believer.

The purpose clause attached to the implicit verb ‘let it be’ in the core expression of verse six, further defines the importance of ‘gracious’ and ‘salty’ speech by believers to outsiders. The objective of this kind of speech with non-Christians is “so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone” (εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἑκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι). Although somewhat similar to the admonition in 1 Peter 3:15b-16a,³⁷ the setting in 1 Peter is of Christians defending their faith against persecutors. But in Colossians a positive relationship with non-Christian neighbors is assumed.

Believers need to understand their Christian faith sufficiently to be able to explain it to non-Christians. But the way of explaining it must reflect the life changing presence of God’s grace in the believer that motivates and guides an explanation with ‘gracious’ and ‘tasty’ words. This comes about only with careful study of scripture, discussion with other believers, and deep reflection on one’s faith commitment. And it assumes a friendly posture toward non-believers.

When Paul closes out his admonitions to believers in the Lycus valley, he lays on them -- and on us today -- a heavy responsibility for prayer and witness. God’s people need to be talking to the Lord earnestly and talking to non-Christians graciously and winsomely.³⁸

³⁷1 Peter 3:15b-16a NRSV: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

ἔτοιμοι αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν,

³⁸An interesting application is proposed by Ian S McNaughton:

When speaking, care must be taken to be gracious and wise: ‘Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt.’ To speak well of Christ, local churches and pastors is the height of wisdom. People are more inclined to ‘read’ believers’ actions rather than the Bible. Wise words from believers will prevent outsiders slandering the local church, and will help to advance the kingdom of Christ. Christians are to let God’s grace teach them how to handle others well. Paul’s use of the word ‘always’ alerts us to the need to show grace even when provoked (1:11; Eph. 4:29). Because of this, the believer’s conversations and retorts need to be ‘seasoned with salt’. Paul is reminding them that the tongue is the most difficult member of the body to control (James 3:1–10). His illustration is apt, as Christian conversation should be both appetizing (tasty) and beneficial (nutritious), thus leaving the outsiders wanting more (1 Tim. 3:7).

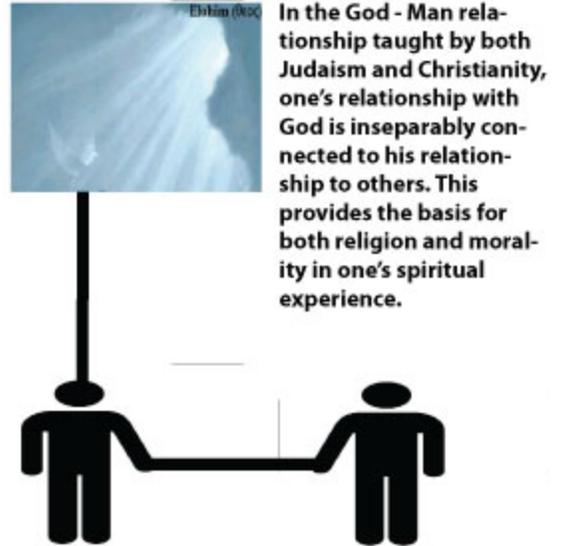
Put your own name in this verse: ‘Let ...’s speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt.’ Let this be so when you are with your friends and the tendency is to be unguarded and crude, or when confronted by your enemies and the tendency is to be rude and harsh. Rather let there be a gracious habit of speech, not abusive, not vindictive, but truthful and loving (Eph. 4:15a; 1 Peter 2:23; Prov. 10:32; Eccles. 10:12). Paul is encouraging us to speak the right word to the right person at the right time.

[Ian S McNaughton, *Opening Up Colossians and Philemon* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 87.]

2. What does the text mean to us today?

The paraenetic nature of this passage makes its contemporary application much easier and more direct. The foundational vertical / horizontal nature of Christianity provides the basis for this collection of three admonitions. We begin with serious use of prayer that includes intercession for spiritual leaders and their witness particularly to the outside world. We then concern ourselves with our own relationships with non-believers. Our behavior and our speaking with them are emphasized in terms of maximizing the opportunity to present a positive witness to them concerning the Gospel and the power of God's grace through Christ to transform human life and relationships.

The primary emphasis with the use of the second person plural verbs in the three admonitions is collective. That is, Paul is speaking to the church in its collective responsibility for praying and witnessing to outsiders. Thus the application not only touches individual Christian responsibility as a part of the community of believers, it also stresses the community responsibilities as well. In personal devotions and relationships with non-believers these responsibilities apply. But equally so, and even more, is the responsibility of the church in gathered assembly to focus on prayer and in its corporate witness to the outside world it is to manifest these same qualities in its behavior and speech.



- 1) How important is prayer to you?
- 2) How important is prayer in your church? Does your congregation spend time praying in its worship?
- 3) How well do you get along with your non-Christian neighbors?
- 4) Do your non-Christian friends find you an interesting person to talk with?
- 5) How well can you explain your Christian faith to non-believers?
- 6) How well does your church relate to the outside world? Does it clearly reflect Christian values in its dealings with non-believers?