

The Primacy of Prayer (Colossians 4:2-6)

This morning, I want to begin with a short review, recalling what Paul has been teaching us through this letter.

As he always does, Paul starts with doctrine and he points us to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, who He is and what He does. Jesus Christ is none other than the eternal Son of God who entered the world He created to live a perfect, sinless, human life and then sacrifice that life on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of all who would believe. And He was raised from the dead, ascending into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, interceding for those who are called by His name.

Are you called by His name? Are you a Christian? Have you accepted His Lordship? Have you believed who He is and what He accomplished? Have you repented of your sin and turned to Jesus? If you have, there will be evidence in the way you live your life.

That's where Paul gets practical. In Chapter 3, Paul begins to teach us how the Christian is supposed to live in this fallen world. We're to seek the things that are above, to live our lives are hidden with Christ. We are to actively put off the old man who lives for the stuff and junk of the world, and put on the new man who lives for the kingdom.

We are to seek His will by diving into word of God. We are to seek the welfare of others over that of ourselves.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

Paul showed us how we are to glorify God in our marriages and in our families. He showed us how we are to glorify God in our working relationships. And as we continue this morning, Paul is going to show us how we are to glorify God with our mouths.

The way you speak should identify you as a Christian. Jesus said:

... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matthew 12:34)

If you have a new heart, your speech should reflect it. The unredeemed heart speaks foolishly. In Romans, Chapter 3, Paul quotes from the Old Testament when he writes:

"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN TOMB; WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY HAVE PRACTICED DECEIT"; "THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS." (Romans 3:13-14)

He's describing the filth that proceeds from an unredeemed mouth. I like the way John MacArthur puts it: He says "Speech is the gate by which depravity exits." James writes about this too. Speaking of the tongue, he says:

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:9-10)

We are Christians. What proceeds out of our mouths must glorify our Lord and Savior. We must always be speaking in the name of the Lord Jesus. We cannot do that unless we are speaking with the Lord Jesus, Which is why I titled this message "The Primacy of Prayer".

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, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.
(Colossians 4:2-6)

The most important conversation you will ever have is the one with your God. Prayer is an incredible gift. It is our means of communicating directly with the Most High. In Jesus Christ we are invited to ...

... come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

How sad is it that we don't take full advantage of this incredible opportunity!

Paul exhorts us to *Continue earnestly in prayer*. The word translated Continue earnestly is *proskartereo*. *Kartereo* is a word that means to be strong, to endure. The prefix *pros* is used to intensify the idea. The idea is that we are to be intensely earnest in our prayer life. And we are to persevere in prayer.

Too often, we write down our prayer requests and just sort of hold them up to the Lord saying "Well, Lord, you know what they are already; would you just take care of them for me." And then we go on with our day.

But the prayer Paul is describing is more like wrestling with God. It's like what Jacob did at Peniel. He wrestled with God all night and he wouldn't let Him go until he received the blessing he had been promised.

We have been given great and precious promises in the word of God. None is greater and more precious than the one in 1 John:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

So don't give up. Persevere in prayer! Wrestle with God in your prayer life.

"Lord you have promised this in your word. If you grant my petition, You will be glorified. Please bless your servant by granting his petition."

Continue earnestly in prayer. But be sure as you are wrestling, you wrestle with thanksgiving. Be *vigilant in it with thanksgiving*, Paul writes.

This is actually the fifth time Paul has made this exhortation in Colossians. It's not that long of a letter.

He said we are to be ... *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.* (Colossians 1:12)

In Chapter 2, verse 6, he told us to abound in the faith with thanksgiving.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

And now we are to vigilant in prayer with thanksgiving.

You should be thankful that you have the privilege of prayer. In prayer, you can enter His very presence. You can be thankful that He has given you the faith to believe. And you can be thankful that God will always answer your prayer according to His own perfect will. Maybe it won't be in the way you thought it should go. But you can have confidence that His way is always better. And you can be thankful for His unconditional promises.

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Stand on the promises of God ... with thanksgiving!

We need to be praying specifically for the Gospel to go forth effectively. It's almost like Paul is sneaking this in on us.

... 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, as I ought to speak. (Colossians 4:3-4)

Do you think this world could use the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you think our country would be better off if it turned to Christ? Are there individuals in this community, in your own circle of influence who are speeding down the highway to hell right now?

We need to pray for open doors. We need to pray for the opportunity to speak the mystery of Christ, to make it manifest; to make it clear. It's what we ought to do.

Paul was in prison as He was writing this. He was chained for the Gospel. Still, he was looking for, longing for, and most importantly, praying for opportunities to preach the word to unbelievers.

What is your excuse?

The most important thing we do at Canyon Community Church is preach the word of Christ. You can help. Pray for opportunities to preach to unbelievers. Encourage them to come worship with us. Encourage them to come to a Bible study. Encourage them to get involved with a Contenders course. Pray for open doors.

And then speak to yet-to-believers by your Christian performance.

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. (Colossians 4:5)

Parsing this short verse leads you to a very important principle with regard to the Christian lifestyle. Paul exhorts us to walk in wisdom. And of course,

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)

If you are to walk wisely, you must be acutely aware of God's presence in your life. You have to know Jesus. So you have to know your Bible, because this Book is about Him.

He said *"lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Amen.
(Matthew 28:20)

Jesus will never leave you; Jesus will never forsake you. Are you aware of His presence? When you keep Him in mind, you will find yourself talking to Him all the time. Walking in wisdom fully involves the primacy of prayer. When you encounter those who are outside, those who are yet-to-believe, you need to ask Jesus for help. I promise you, He will deliver.

Nehemiah understood this. Nehemiah was the cup bearer for the Persian king Artaxerxes. He was a Jew, concerned about the fate of Jerusalem. He had been praying, wrestling with God about Jerusalem. He desperately wanted to see the wall rebuilt and He had been pouring his soul out to God asking Him to remember His promise to the nation. He'd prayed so hard that he exhausted himself and the king noticed.

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" (Nehemiah 2:1-3)

Now, Nehemiah had good cause to be afraid. In that culture, to come before the king with a long face was considered a serious offence. He could have lost his life.

Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 2:4)

Nehemiah had been praying for days and nights, persisting in prayer. But this prayer had to be really short - a quickie. He'd been asked a question by the king and the king was expecting an answer.

But Nehemiah was aware of God's presence. He was living *Coram Deo*. And so, he simply asked for help: "Lord, help me say the right thing."

When you are aware of the presence of God, when you are living *Coram Deo*, then your prayers will come whenever you need them, in real time. And most will be pretty short.

"Jesus, help me say the right thing here."

"Help me make a decision that honors you."

"Lord, help me find my car keys."

"Thank you that You are always with me."

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

That is how you walk in wisdom toward those who are outside. But Paul adds another phrase here: *redeeming the time*. What does that mean? To really understand it, we need to look at the Greek and the Greek word translated "time" is not *chronos*, which would be a period of time as measured by a clock. The word is *kairos* (*καιρός*), which an opportune time. I would paraphrase it this way:

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, taking advantage of every opportunity. (Colossians 4:5)

Today is the day of salvation. We don't know when the Lord is coming back. You don't know when that neighbor of yours will keep his appointment with death. We need to maintain a sense of urgency regarding those who are without Christ. Our lifestyle must be a testament to His living reality.

So we communicate Christ by the way we conduct ourselves, but we also communicate Christ in the way we speak.

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. (Colossians 4:6)

We're not just talking about sharing Christ here. Your everyday speech should identify you as a follower of Christ.

If an individual born and raised in Alabama were to show up here, chances are that their speech would tell us that they're not from around here. Well, do you have a Christian accent? I'm not talking about speaking good Christian, using all sorts of Christian buzz phrases that we don't even understand much of the time. I'm asking is your speech gracious toward those outside the Church?

We have a problem with this in the so-called Christian community. Our speech is not always gracious. It seems like we're more concerned with defending ourselves against real and perceived persecution. And our defense is too often shrill, angry, and even hateful.

It is the exact opposite of the exhortation Paul gives us in verse 6. Our speech is to be with grace. God's grace. We are to extend His unmerited favor to others.

Our speech is to be seasoned with salt. This is interesting – to the Greeks, salt is emblematic of wit. So to state this negatively, our conversation must not be witless.

So much of what I see on Facebook is quite witless. If you don't like somebody, it seems like it's okay to make stuff up about him. Or to pass on gossip that has no basis of truth. Slander and libel are examples of evil-speaking. The Bible tells us to lay that stuff aside.

We must be committed to the truth, and we must deliver seasoned truth, truth that is palatable. The truth of God's grace and love.

Peter expresses the same principle when he writes:

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and 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**; (1 Peter 3:15)*

Our conversations should reveal our humility, our complete trust in the finished work of Christ, and our confident hope that we will spend eternity with Him. We don't need to be shrill. We don't need to be afraid. We don't need to be angry. Jesus has won the victory, and we are on the winning side. Let us be gracious victors. Let us graciously invite others to join the victory parade.

Well, your speech will never honor Christ until you submit to the Holy Spirit. It's why prayer is so critical. You need to spend time alone with God, wrestling with Him. Confess your shortcomings. Tell Him your deepest desires. Claim the promises He has given in His word. Which means you have to study to know what they are. Be persistent.

But you also need to recognize and enjoy His presence as you make your way through each and every day. You can talk with Him anytime. He hears short, quick prayers. He answers short, quick prayers.

Living in the presence of God is the attitude we must all strive for. Live *Coram Deo*, and let the words of your mouth identify you as a child of the King.