

Take Your Bibles, Please...

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Colossians 4:1-6 ESV).

One of the first attitudes ever expressed verbally or by the actions of a very small child is the attitude of possession. They believe that everything is theirs as long as they can see or reach it! You can almost see their chubby little fists as they clutch some valued possession and bring it to their chest and say some of their first words - MINE. They are establishing the fact that it belongs to them and you are not to have anything to do with it. That is the principle root of possession.

Now if that's one of the first attitudes that you see in a child, I think it goes without saying that one of the first changes in attitudes that parents want to effect in their children is to teach them how to share. I can almost hear the words of countless parents through the years as they admonish their children: "Now you must learn how to share with the other children."

The tendency is that we want to keep and protect that which is our very own. Parents spend a lot of time trying to cultivate and change that attitude because it goes against the very personalities we possess when we come into this world. If you follow the process of what happens and how we've come in the physical realm to be able to share that which we have it really says that we grow into sharing. Therefore, I think you could say that the process of learning how to share is the process of maturity. That maturity can be equated with sharing. The more we mature, the more we become a whole person, the more we are willing and able - and desire to share. You can apply this to many areas. You can apply it to physical possessions. We should ask ourselves: what are we going to do with the physical possessions God has given to us and entrusted to our keeping? If we haven't come to that place of maturity in our lives where God wants us to be and we clutch it all in that little tight chubby fist of the baby and we pull it to ourselves and say it's mine, I made it, I'm going to keep it, we won't learn the joy and the excitement of giving and sharing that which God has entrusted to us.

However, we should also apply it to our love and concern for other people. I want to take this principle out of the realms of financial and material possessions and apply it to sharing in the area of your most valuable possession. You see, the most valuable possession you and I have is that which is inside us. It is our personal experience with Jesus Christ. I'm not sure I'm able to analyze and evaluate why it is so hard for us to share it. We ought to be ready and willing to share the salvation we know, the Gospel that has made possible the peace and the things we enjoy as God's children. But I think it's very closely akin to what I've just said. It's a matter of maturity and growing in our relationship to God and coming to the place where we can genuinely share the Gospel out of this kind of growth maturity, love and concern.

We must come to the realization that when Jesus Christ walked on this earth, walked among people, died on a cruel cross, was buried and on the third day came forth, He made possible our salvation and the Christian experience as you and I know it. He went away to be with the Father and left a small band of Christians to spread the Gospel around the world. That's the same plan God has today. We have many programs and activities in our church during any given week. The purpose of every one of these ought to be to point men and women, boys and girls to Christ. **The church finds its best expression, not in what happens here in this building, but as we leave this place and fan out over the area of Middle Tennessee. We become the church scattered. And that's where the battle is won! You have to work out your own way: the how of you doing it. However, we must be intentional about doing it. There has to be some kind of a constructive effort on our part if we are to be effective in sharing the Gospel.**

So, let's walk through these verses and look at the ten basic concepts of how you and I can get hold of the matter of bearing our witness.

### **First, There Is Prayer.**

Paul says, *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it (v. 2)*. You have to start with prayer. We must realize that it is God who goes before us and prepares the way in the hearts of people with whom we come into contact. You have to pray that God will prepare the way. Paul is talking about a fundamental and a permanent principle in your Christian life and that's prayer.

- ✚ **He's talking about being in an attitude of prayer - day after day, hour after hour.** He's not talking about going around with your head bowed all the time. You'll run into something. He's not saying to pray while you're driving. You can pray at a stop light if you can get that worked out. He's not saying pray all the time. He's saying it's an attitude.
- ✚ **He's also drawing a contrast between genuine prayer and the mere formality of prayer.** Most of us have a problem with this. You might as well admit it. I admit it - we play at the matter of prayer. Most of us don't really pray until we get our backs against a wall and all the alternatives have been closed. Then we get serious about prayer. So he's drawing a comparison to the difference between mere formality and really praying and making it a part of our life.
- ✚ **He's saying that we ought to be alert and wakeful in prayer.** In other words we ought to watch what's going on in the world as we pray. We ought to know where the enemies are. We ought to be able to discern the meaning of God's dealings with us - His efforts to guide us as we move day by day and hour by hour. Pray for God's leadership and wisdom.

### **Second, We Should Possess the Attitude of Thanksgiving.**

Paul also says, *In the spirit of thanksgiving (v. 2)*. You and I will not be much of a witness until we get this right because this is an attitude about God. When I read that, the thought that flashes in my mind is that the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning as you stare at the ceiling is to thank God for all of His blessings. You don't have to look around you very far until you come to the conclusion that the material possessions you have, the health you have, the happiness you have can all be swept away in the twinkling of an eye. It's temporary. If you are able to get out of bed and get here you ought to live in a spirit of thanksgiving whatever comes. It is a spirit of thanksgiving.

### **Third, We Should Recognize the Open Doors.**

Paul now says, *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word (v. 3)*. He didn't say pray for me that I'll say the right words. He didn't say pray for me that I have spiritual strength. He started out by saying pray for me that God will open the door. We ought to pray every day that God will prepare the way - open the doors, make us sensitive to those with whom we come in contact who are ready to hear the Gospel. You heard the testimony. Pray that God will open doors. But don't pray that prayer unless you are ready to walk in them because He'll open them - opportunity after opportunity - open doors through which the Gospel may enter.

### **Fourth, We See the Mystery of Christ.**

The fourth principle involves speaking the mystery of Christ. Notice what Paul says: *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ (v. 3)*. There are passages of Scripture that say, "to those who do not know Christ, the Gospel is foolishness." That's what he's talking about. He's saying that you're going to get all kinds of receptions out there as you witness. Don't be alarmed. Just remember that that which you are talking about, that which you are sharing is a mystery. All through the New Testament it is referred to as the mystery of the Gospel. And when Christ came, He revealed the mystery. He put it before men. He made the mystery understandable. The mystery must first be experienced and then explained. This requires us to take inventory of our lives and see where we stand and then explain the mystery.

### **Fifth, We Should Recognize the Gospel Is for All People.**

Paul says, as I write this, I literally have the shackles about my legs. I am in bonds. I am in prison. How did he get in prison? He got there because he had been proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews. They said that if you accept the Messiah, you have to come to Judaism first. They limited the Gospel. Paul went all over the known world saying, that's not true. He said that the Gospel is for everyone. The universality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ - that's the reason he ended in jail. He said I am in bonds. I am in jail. I am in prison. I've lived this kind of life because I preach the Gospel to all men. Most of us pick to whom we want to witness. Paul says you can't pick who you witness to. The Gospel is for the cultured and the uncultured. It's for the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. There are no limits - the Gospel is universal and we need to witness to all. Our tendency is to witness down. It's a lot easier - we think - to witness to people who we can talk down to for one reason or another. The problem here is that if we're not careful, even because we are Christians and they are not, we have been saved and they are still in sin, we portray the attitude that we are better than they are and we condemn them for what they've done. That's not what he's talking about. He says the Gospel is for all and it is universal and every man stands on level ground at the foot of the cross.

### **Sixth, We See the Principle of Speaking.**

He says, *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak (v. 4)*. Other translations use the word "manifest" for "clear." The word means "to speak out." Paul emphasizes our responsibility to make manifest, to speak out - the long concealed mystery of God, the grace and purpose of Christ. We need to share it and make it known verbally.

## Seventh, We See the Principle of Walking in Wisdom.

The apostle says, *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders* (v. 5). The word “walk” in the New Testament usually refers to living. As you live day by day, live as wise people. That means as Christians we don't go around with our heads in the sand. We know what's going on in the world and we are able to face and evaluate it and call right 'right' and wrong 'wrong' and are able to take a position as God's children. We're not to go around in a way that says to the world we're unwise and foolish. He says walk in wisdom and then he uses two very interesting words.

- ✚ *The first is “toward.”* Toward means a move and it means toward those that are 'without' the Kingdom. In other words, we are to move toward those that do not know Christ - the lost people in the world.
- ✚ *The second is “in wisdom,” we are to move aggressively toward lost individuals.* These are the people with whom you work, shop, or those who wait on you. He says don't sit around waiting for them to come to you. Go to them! I think this is one of the tragedies in the churches in America today. Somehow we've gotten the feeling that all we have to do is provide a good program and open the doors and people will rush in. You have to be proactive; take your stand and move toward people who are lost.

## Eighth, We Should Redeem the Time.

Paul says, *making the best use of the time* (v. 5). **A better translation is buying up all the opportunities God presents.** Paul says we are to be sensitive to the opportunities God gives to bear a witness. You can go around in a very insensitive manner and have all kinds of opportunities presented and just pass them by never relating. The average person here will come into contact with between 50 and 100 unsaved people before returning here next Sunday. Buy up the opportunities. Establish a pattern for witnessing and take advantage of each opportunity.

## Ninth, Speak with Grace.

Paul says, *Let your speech always be gracious* (v. 6). Speak with grace. Be gracious, pleasing, agreeable. What comes out of our mouths is that which is inside of us. And he says the grace of God abides in you. Your speech ought to be with grace. Speak from the inward condition. What he's really saying is that the hearer may not agree with the contents of what you say, but the hearer should never have reason to question the spirit of what you say.

## Tenth, We Should Be Wholesome.

Last Paul uses the phrase, *seasoned with salt* (v. 6). This indicates we are to have a wholesome, helpful, healing quality. Season what you say and make everything you say wholesome and helpful. It should not be forceful, arrogant, or harsh. Rather we ought to speak out of the grace and love of Christ. All of this is to say that the way of the Christian often puts us on the defensive. We're in a minority. Where you work, where you associate, you're often on the defensive and in the minority. There are a lot of different people out there. They come from different backgrounds. They carry a lot of baggage and all of this is said so you can know

how to answer every man. It is important for Christians to be intelligent in their understanding of their faith - for us to know what we believe.

Well we can sum it all up. Paul is saying that sharing one's personal witness and faith is not an option. The only plan that God has for spreading the Gospel - the Good News - is us.