

Colossians 4:5–6 — Walk in Wisdom

Redeeming Opportunities and Speech Seasoned with Salt

Scripture Reading: Colossians 4:5–6

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

The Setting: Colossae and the Love of Wisdom

The difficulty at Colossae had largely to do with the mind. Chapter 2:8 warns them: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” There was an appetite there for the mental accomplishments that men strive after so they can feel good about themselves — so that others may look up to them. The very word philosophy means love of wisdom, but this was wisdom falsely so-called.

Against that background, chapter 4:5 gives the true use of wisdom: “Walk in wisdom toward those without.” Not to flaunt it. Not to display it for the sake of status. But to walk in it — which implies habitual, practical activity, not just the right frame of mind. The apostle Paul, who was second to none in learning and intelligence, having spent the early part of his life in unceasing study of the traditions and teachings of his ancestors, realized it was of no value and laid it all aside. He is the one who delivers this exhortation.

Redeeming Opportunities

The expression “redeeming opportunities” (or as the King James renders it, “redeeming the time”) is a striking one. The picture is of a wise person actively seizing the moment — like taking a coupon and actually using it rather than letting it expire. The opportunity comes, often in a split second, and the question is whether wisdom is at hand to meet it.

Consider Peter in the garden, when the high priest’s servant stood before him. Peter had zeal and energy in abundance — no one would question that. He drew the sword and cut off the man’s ear. But what he left behind was someone who would have difficulty hearing the gospel. The Lord healed the servant’s ear. There was an opportunity there; what was lacking was wisdom.

The Lord Jesus, by contrast, always fulfilled this verse. At the well in Sychar, when the woman of Samaria tried to steer the conversation toward religious formalities, the Lord said simply: “Go, call thy husband.” He did not lecture her. He said nothing about himself. He addressed her conscience on the matter of God’s institution of marriage, and the woman’s conscience knew exactly what was meant. With infinite wisdom, He redeemed that opportunity. Before Pilate He was silent — and the effect of that silence was such that Pilate recognized a righteous man standing before him. No formula covers every moment; wisdom is needed for what each moment requires.

The walk this verse describes is not occasional. It is habitual. A Christian’s conduct should be characteristically marked by that wisdom which knows how to redeem the opportunities that come. And by implication, practice of this kind invites questions. This connects naturally to 1 Peter 3:15: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” The pre-requisite Peter gives is to sanctify the Lord God in the heart. The clearer that settledness of heart is, the readier the timely word will be.

Let Your Word Be with Grace, Seasoned with Salt

J.N. Darby's translation renders verse 6 as: "Let your word be always with grace, seasoned with salt." The word "word" is stronger than "speech" — speech can be cheap, but word carries the sense of a communication that has something of value behind it. John 1 connects it to the very expression of who God is: light and love. The word, then, should be a communication of substance.

Grace is not simply the subject matter. The verse does not say, let your word always speak about grace. It says, let it be with grace — that is, grace should be the character of the communication itself. When the Lord Jesus spoke to the woman at the well and touched her conscience on the subject of marriage, he was not speaking about grace. And yet He did it with grace.

Salt is harder to define precisely. It serves as a flavor enhancer, a preservative, and in its raw application to soil — as at Jericho, which Joshua salted after its destruction — a poison to whatever sprang up from the flesh. Each of these aspects illuminates something of what salt does, though none of them alone quite captures what salt is. A note found in the margin of A.C. Brown's copy of J.N. Darby's Synopsis suggested that salt speaks of a faithfulness to the Lord Jesus — an utter devotion to Him that sets aside every other temporal consideration, because what matters above all is the Lord Jesus and His things and His glory.

Matthew 5:13 adds this: "Ye are the salt of the earth. But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" Salt is the only thing that is salty. There is no substitute for it. In that sense, salt is truth. Grace seasoned with salt, then, is a word that is gracious in character and truthful in substance — not a dusting of truth added at the end of many humorous stories, as is common in Christendom, but a communication that from the beginning has the Lord Jesus Christ and what is due to Him as its substance and weight.

The Living Examples That Follow

The chapter could have ended at verse 6. It would have been a clean conclusion. But the apostle Paul does not leave the Colossians with mere theory. What

follows in verses 7 through 17 is a gallery of living examples — men who had actually lived out something of what these verses call for. These were not hypothetical cases. They were known persons, known to Paul and some of them known to the Colossians. They were practical demonstrations that what the epistle taught was not only possible in theory but had found expression in living men.

When grouped, they appear in pairs and threes: first two (Tychicus and Onesimus), then three (Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus called Justus), then more to follow. That the passage is structured this way is not accidental. Two or three, two or three — consistently, the smallest number in which fellowship can be expressed and in which the Lord has promised to be present.

Walk in wisdom. Redeem the opportunity. Let the word be with grace, seasoned with salt.