

Seasoned With Salt

⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Col. 4:5-6)

1. There is WISDOM in the WAY

“wisdom toward outsiders”

It has been said the church of every generation is responsible for that generation of people.

We have a divine responsibility to reach our generation with the gospel.

Since this is true we need to be wise in how we relate to and deal with unbelievers outside the body of Christ

In order to better understand what I mean by this ...

... I want us to read a passage of scripture from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church,

... but before I do I need to give you some background.

The Corinthian church was born 10 years prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians

... this happened through the ministry of Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul.

Most of the converts that made up the Corinthian church came to Christ from paganism and from a wide variety of backgrounds and situations.

Some were laborers, some educated, some illiterate, some poor, some wealthy, some Jewish, most Gentile.

So ethnically, socially, and economically, speaking the community of faith in Corinth was extremely diverse.

And yet, ... Paul never tells us to deal differently with the different groups of people within the body of Christ.

In fact, there were supposed to be no “groups” in the church... there were no identity politics within the church.

... and that is because IN CHRIST we become one.

Paul only saw two kinds of people ... there are those who are saved and those who are unsaved.

We know from the things that Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that in the fall of 50 A.D. he wrote to the Corinthian church and then they had responded back with a number of questions...

... neither one of those letters have been preserved.

... But, in the spring of the next year (51 AD) Paul wrote a response letter back to the church ...

... that is what we now know as 1 Corinthians.

In this letter it is obvious that the Corinthian church was dealing with number of complex dynamics

- Becoming devoted followers of different personalities (1:10–4:21; 16:10–18)
- Incest (5:1–13)
- Prostitution (6:12–21)
- There were over spiritualized people demanding to live celibate lives with their spouses (7:1–7)
- Christians who were married (some to believers, others to non-believers) were asking about divorce (7:8–16, 39)
- There were other questions regarding marriage and remarriage (7:25–40)
- Lawsuits between Christians (6:1–11)
- Question of whether or not to eat meat offered to idols (8:1–11:1)
- Issues concerning women praying and prophesying in immodest ways (11:2–16)
- Chaos in worship, with speaking in tongues (chapter 14)
- Economic inequities in the love feasts and communion (11:17–34)

- Some Christians were denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus and Christians (15:1–58)
- There was a collection of monies to be sent to Jerusalem (16:1–4)
- A change in Paul’s travel plans (16:5–9).

If you were counting, that was 14 different issues.

But in reality, these issues were symptoms that rose up out of **3 key problems**.

One, they did not understand biblical love, or relate to each other in biblical love, which was the purpose behind Paul’s definition of love in 1 Cor. 13.

Two, there was a proud and divisive spirit in the church regarding wealth, status, and belief.

Three, a group in the church denied the importance of the body or what anyone did with their body.

... if there was a 4th issue it was the weakness of the elders in the church to adequately deal with these divisions.

... so, Paul had to, in this letter, from a distance deal with these issues.

... particularly, in Paul’s dealing with sexual immorality within the church Paul gives us a truth that is quite profound ...

... Paul instructs us on how we should deal with those outside the church as opposed to those inside the church.

Look ...

⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. (1 Cor. 5:9-11)

Please notice Paul advises the Christians to continue to associate with immoral people who do not profess to be Christians ...

... ON THE OTHER HAND

... if a “so-called” Christian was living a life that was immoral, covetous, idolatrous, reviler (verbally abusive) drunkard, or a swindler—they were not to even eat with them.

Now think about what Paul is saying ...

How we treat and talk with those “outside” the church is not as plain and direct (it is more tolerant and longsuffering) than how we treat and talk with those **in those same sins** who claim to know Jesus.

This is the truth that Paul is referencing here in Colossians.

The 2 key components of the Christian faith is evangelism and discipleship.

Here in Colossians 4 Paul is concerned about evangelism ... about those “outside” being brought INTO the kingdom of God.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul asks them to pray that he will not only have an open door to share the gospel, but also that he will know how to “speak” the gospel to unbelievers.

Every conversation with unbelievers is an opportunity ... a space filled with possibility

Let me explain what I mean by telling you about **Rosaria Butterfield**

Ms. Butterfield was one of the speakers at the 2015 SBC National convention.

Butterfield — once a liberal, feminist, lesbian college professor at Syracuse University ...

... she is now a pastor's wife

In 1997, after she wrote a scathing article about a nearby Promise Keepers conference, a Presbyterian pastor (Ken Smith) in town sent her a letter challenging her presuppositions and inviting her to dinner at his home.

After initially throwing the letter away, she dug it back out and decided to visit him.

Their interaction eventually grew into a friendly relationship.

She said ...

“I felt that when Ken [Smith] extended his hand to me in friendship, it was safe for me to close mine in his,” she said.

“I wasn’t Ken’s project; I was Ken’s neighbor.

This wasn’t friendship evangelism; this was friendship.”

Through the consistent love and care from Pastor Ken Smith and his wife, Floy, Ms. Butterfield was gradually exposed to a holy God who hated sin but extended love and grace to broken people.

Interestingly enough the Smiths never explained the gospel to her, nor did they invite her to church ...

... instead, they treated her as a friend and patiently encouraged her to read her Bible carefully.

She said,

“I actually started to read the Bible like I was trained to read a book,”

“I was a heathen reading the Bible. ... I read the way a glutton devours

Slowly and over time, the Bible started to take on a life and a meaning that startled me.”

Butterfield’s regular exposure to Word of God slowly began to change her, and even her friends within the gay community began to notice.

Butterfield found the structure of Romans 1 particularly gripping, with its unflinching condemnation of sin and its close literary relationship with the narrative of humanity’s fall into sin recorded in Genesis 3.

She said ...

“The two biblical frames, now — one in Genesis and one in Romans — stood out as bookends of my life,”

“But not just my life ... Genesis 3 and Romans 1 stood out as the table of contents for what ails the world.”

After she had read through the Bible seven times, Butterfield continued to wrestle with it spiritually.

Then one Sunday when Rev. Smith preached a sermon on Jesus feeding the 5,000, he paused to emphasize Jesus’ words to Peter and the disciples: “Do you still lack understanding?”

Ms Butterfield said,

“This startled me, because this was my question,”

“I realized that question was just for me—do I still lack understanding?”

It was then that I wondered who was actually speaking here:

that old man behind the pulpit or the God-man from before the foundations of the world?

... that question completely disarmed me, and truth be told, it still does.”

It was through deep, heartfelt repentance that Butterfield began to experience new life and her life has significantly changed even more since her conversion.

When asked how her own salvation has changed her relationships with her unsaved friends, she said...

“My words are not pep talks. I hope, indeed that my words are not even my own, but Christ’s working through me.”

We need wisdom in the way we talk to unbelievers.

2. There is GRACE in the SPIRIT

“your speech always be with grace ... seasoned with salt”

In vv. 2-4 of this chapter, Paul shows us that evangelism begins with specific prayer ...

... he wanted them to pray that he would know how to speak.

... in verse 5 Paul encourages us to be wise and make the most of every opportunity to share the gospel

... now in verse 6 he says our speech is to be seasoned with grace and salt.

This phrase “seasoned with salt” in the Greek is *alati er-tu-menos*

This is a Greek metaphor that means to make one’s words palatable—acceptable and agreeable.

The **Roman poet Horace** once praised someone for “*rubbing the city with abundant salt.*”

... Horace was commending them for their words being so well thought out and poignant.

The **philosopher Plutarch** often used *grace and salt* together as a metaphor for speech that was both wise and uplifting.

In order to really understand what Paul is getting at I’d like to **point you to a passage in Peter’s first epistle.**

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, ¹⁵ But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:14-16)

Peter gives the hypothetical of sharing the gospel with someone who is your adversary...

... they are causing you to suffer ... they are intimidating you

Paul says here is what you should do:

- Remind yourself that Christ is Lord in your heart
- Tell your adversary why your ultimate hope is in Christ
 - ... that Christ is the supreme sovereign, and Lord of your life
- ... and say this with such gentleness and reverence that you maintain a clear conscience that your behavior is Christ like.

LISTEN: One of the greatest indicators of your faith and character is the words you say and the spirit in which you say them.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Cor. 13:1)

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29)

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matt. 5:22)

Even sinners know that terrible ungracious, unloving, unkind talk is bad...

The philosopher Socrates 469-399 BC (who was before Christ and not a follower of the true God)

... so a sinner ... and unbeliever ...

Although he was an unsaved man Socrates was a wise and earthly good person

Socrates had what has been called a **triple filter test** for conversation.

It is said that one day an acquaintance ran up to him excitedly and said, "Socrates, do you know what I just heard about one of your students?"

Before listening to what the acquaintance had to say Socrates told him the message had to go through a triple filter test.

Socrates asked him a question: "Are you absolutely sure that what you're going to tell me is true?"

The acquaintance thought for a moment and then said he couldn't be sure that what his friend had told him was actually true. It was a matter of perspective.

"So, said Socrates, you do not know if this thing true or not," The acquaintance had to admit that he didn't.

Socrates asked him a second question: "Is what you're going to tell me good or bad?"

The acquaintance replied that it wasn't good at all. In fact, it was quite bad.

Socrates said: "So, you're going to tell me something bad, but you're not completely sure it's true".

The acquaintance admitted that this was the case.

Then, Socrates asked the third and final question: "Is what you have to say about my student going to help me?"

The acquaintance hesitated.

... He really didn't know if the information he had was useful or not.

"Well," concluded Socrates,

"if what you want to tell me is neither True nor Good nor even Useful, then why tell it to me at all?"

... in fact, why would I even want to hear it?"

The first step to being a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ begins by being able to control your tongue and only use it for good.

A slanderous tongue is never an evangelistic tongue because honey and poison cannot come from the same source.

Whether you know it or not, people all around you are listening when you talk, and they are drawing conclusions [based upon your talk] about your character and trustworthiness.

... everything people hear you say is preparing them to either accept or reject the gospel.

Jesus gives us this same warning.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (Matt. 5:13)

You see when you call someone "salt of the earth" you mean that they live a life filled with the best and noblest virtues ...

Salty lives are lives seasoned with grace ... they are lives that give our words credibility.

Do you remember what the book of Acts says about Peter and John ...?

... it says that they were 'ignorant men but the people took note that they had been with Jesus.'

- There should be wisdom in the way we talk
- There should be grace and salt in the spirit of our talk

3. There is HOPE in the RELATIONSHIP

I want to illustrate that this is exactly how Paul lived his life

... I want to do this by reading to you the last few verses of this letter.

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. ¹⁶ When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. ¹⁷ Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you. (Col. 4:7-18)

Paul refers to 10 specific people as well as the citizens of Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

There is no question that Paul cherished every one of these relationships

- faithful,
- fellow bondservants of Christ,
- fellow prisoners,
- fellow workers,
- beloved brothers and sisters ...

For Paul the hope and reality was that each relationship would be one of salvation, discipleship, and spiritual growth.

What is often overlooked in our admiration of Paul is that he “felt” about people.

The personal and intimate greetings in all of Paul’s writings reveals that he cared deeply for people.

In the last chapter of 2 Timothy, Paul’s last letter he tells Timothy:

- Make every effort to come to me soon ... and later to come before winter
- Only Luke is with me.
- Pick up Mark and bring him with you
- Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself
- At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.

I hope you can see in the Apostle Paul the character of Christ.

Remember what Jesus told the thief on the other cross ... **‘today you will be with me in paradise.’**

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he connected his mother Mary to John so that John would take care of her after Jesus was gone. **“Woman behold thy son, son behold thy mother.”**

... and to whom did Jesus speak to last from the cross? **Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, it is finished.**

There is no relationship in your life that is an accident, they have all be ordained by God

Jesus calls you to himself so that he might make you salt so that you might with wisdom, grace, and hope be seasoned with salt ...

... to tell unbelievers about Jesus

... and to disciple, encourage and uplift other Christ followers.